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WRINKLES

THE NIGHTWATCH DETECTIVE

BY

ED L. WHEELER

CHAPTER I.

AN OFFICE MEETING.

In one of the most elegant offices of Philadelphia's popular office street (Walnut street), Trimbal Thackera was seated at his paper-strewn writing-table, examining a package of letters which the postman had just deposited thereon.

Those of a business character were cast aside, the wealthy lawyer and stock speculator evidently being in search of some particular one more important than the rest.

He was a man of some five-and-fifty years, this Thackera, well built and prepossessing of appearance. His face, full and florid, was graced by a pair of luxuriant side-whiskers; his eyes were keen, and rather unnaturally brilliant.

Well attired, graceful of movement, he opened the letters with business-like precision and activity, and at last came to the one he was looking for—a letter directed in a full, manly hand, in which was exhibited both grace of style and perfection of composition, all of which evidently had no charms for the eye of Trimbal Thackera.

His brows were knitted in an ominous scowl as he tore open the envelope.



"NOW MOSEY AN' GIVE THE ORDER OR I'LL PUT THE WHITES O' YER EYES IN MOURNIN'!" THREATENED THE AGGRESSIVE WRINKLES.

It was plain that he had been expecting the arrival of the letter; it was equally plain its reception gave him no pleasure.

The contents, however, were somewhat of a surprise.

First came a letter which would seem to have been written by Mr. Thackera himself, and he flung it aside with a gesture of anger.

The envelope contained one other missive, however, which had more attraction for him. It read:

"PHILADELPHIA, Jan. 20, 18—.

"TRIMBAL THACKERA, Esq.:—

"DEAR SIR:—Your epistle, requesting a personal interview at your office, just rec'd. In reply, will say that it will be my pleasure to wait upon you about ten minutes after your receipt of this.

"Yours respectfully,

"LOU LAWTON."

This perused, Thackera picked up the letter he had previously cast aside, and glanced over it, with satisfaction gleaming from the brilliant eyes.

This second letter was worded:

PHILAD'A, Jan'y 14th, 18—.

"LOUIS LAWTON, Esq.:—

"DEAR SIR:—At your earliest convenience I desire a private interview with you at my office in regard to a matter of the greatest importance to me.

"Yours,

"T. THACKERA."

"I think I detect a bit of sarcasm, in the wording of this Lawton's letter," Thackera soliloquized, as he put both letters on file. "However, after my years of legal practice, if he can deceive me, I am willing to give up beaten. By the way, it will not be long before he arrives, perchance, he is on time, which is doubtful."

The lawyer turned to his other mail matter, and had nearly finished its inspection, when the door opened, and an individual entered.

Individual, we say, because, in appearance he seemed anything else than a gentleman;—in fact the visitor was an ash-cartman!

Only an ash-cartman, but, in truth, none the less a gentleman, and a man of honor.

Broad-shouldered, and otherwise powerfully built, considering that he had not reached his twenty-first year, he was a young knight of labor, who, attired in comely habiliments, must be admired—a man, or youth, whichever he might be most properly denominated, with a full, fresh, intelligent countenance, sparkling brown eyes, and a mouth habitually pleasant of expression, shaded as it was, with a powerful mustache.

But in his dust-covered overalls, hat, and stogy boots, he did not look exactly presentable to the superb surroundings which encompassed Trimbal Thackera.

His bearing, however, was just as calm and composed, as though he had entered the stock-broker's office a millionaire in broadcloth.

Thackera looked up from his letters, with the usual business-like don't-want-to-be-disturbed scowl, allowing his face to express no sign of recognition, although he knew his visitor at a glance.

"You're Mr. Thackera, I presume," the young man said, in a prompt, business-like way.

"Thackera is my name," was the reply. "Will you be seated?"

"My name is Lawton," and the visitor helped himself to a chair.

"Ah! Lawton?" and Mr. Thackera elevated his eyebrows to indicate his surprise. "Louis Lawton?"

"Exactly. I received a note from you, requesting that I should call."

"Ah! certainly. I just received a communication, bearing your signature. But, by-the-by, Mr. Lawton, is there not some little mistake in this matter? It appears to me that you are not the person I am looking for. Have you not a brother, sir?"

"I have not."

"No? Then I do not understand, I am sure. You surely are not the young man who rescued my daughter from drowning several weeks ago and since have been calling upon her?"

"I am that individual," Lawton responded. "It was my good fortune to be near at the time when your daughter's sail-boat overturned, and I picked her up and helped her ashore. As she cordially invited me to call upon her, and I was favorably impressed with her appearance, I have had the honor of being entertained by her on several different occasions."

"Indeed—humph!—yes; so I have learned, and it was in reference to these calls that I had you come here!" and Mr. Thackera looked his guest over from head to foot, disapprovingly.

"You see, my daughter said you were a gentleman occupying a position in the city employ,

and failing to find your name, I naturally felt great anxiety lest my daughter should suffer in a social way, you see, through being acquainted with some adventurer. And, from your present appearance, I must naturally infer that my apprehensions were not without cause."

"Indeed! Please explain!"

"Why, judging by your appearance, you are an ash-cartman—a garbage-collector—while you claimed to my daughter that you were identified with some of the city departments. Your position—well, sir, in short, I must admit that your paying respects to my daughter was a piece of audacity without parallel."

Young Lawton had listened quietly, his face and eyes expressing little of the surprise and indignation he felt at the stock-broker's ungentlemanly manner and language.

"And so, because I am an ash-cartman, you deem me audacious for presuming to seek your daughter's society?"

"I do, most assuredly."

"May I ask why?"

"Certainly. I make no hesitation in answering that you are but a common day-laborer, with little prospect of ever rising out of the sphere in life you now occupy. My daughter, is a refined, intelligent and finely educated young lady, a leader of our society, an heiress in her own right, and infinitely superior to you in point of birth, station, and general qualifications. You must see, accordingly, that it was a grave error on your part to intrude yourself, on the simple strength of the fact that you chanced to do an unquestionably manly act, in saving her from drowning."

"You surprise me," Lawton said, with continued calmness. "Am I to understand that only wealthy, educated, and aristocratic people are ladies and gentlemen? that, because a man is supposedly poor, and an honest laborer, he has no right to social privileges—no right to consideration in any station in life except in that in which his daily lot is cast—no right to rise from poverty—no right to the respect of the world worldly, until, by some streak of luck or fortune—which, nine times out of ten is not open for public inspection—he flashes upon the public, a would-be brilliant monetary meteor—a being of the present, who would not like to confess that he ever had a past, for the reason that, although honest, he had been poor, and obliged to work, to honestly sustain himself? You would like to have every man believe himself beneath your notice until he should be able to present himself for your inspection, with a fat bank account. Am I not right, Trimbal Thackera?"

With scathing sarcasm, young Lawton propounded the query, his eyes flashing, his face flushed.

"The stock-broker's face had grown pale with passion, during this speech.

"I did not invite you here, sir, that I might become an auditor to your harangue," he said, angrily.

"Nor did I come here to permit you to insult me!" Lawton promptly returned. "I chance to be able, sir, to estimate you for exactly what you are—overbearing because you may or may not be worth a few thousands—ungentlemanly because if you ever had any good-breeding you long since have forgotten it, in your mercenary experiences—peevish and irritable because truly good society is aware of your shortcomings, and but for your daughter, would, no doubt, taboo you, utterly. You invited me here—me, a common dirt-begrimed driver of an ash-cart—with the knowledge that I was a suitor for your daughter's hand, expecting to find me some rough, with more animal stamina than brains and education, and hoped, with a few cutting and severe remarks, to so overawe me that I'd be only too eager to get out of your dignified presence; but contrary to your expectations, came a healthy, big-hearted, honest, fairly well-educated and intelligent son of toil, not a bit ashamed of his vocation, not to be overawed by any man, rich or poor—a youth, in years, but with the average sense of many an older man who has arisen to honor and renown by honest toil. I came to hear what you had to say, and think I have caught on to your meaning, which is that you have serious objections to a continuation of my acquaintance with your estimable daughter!"

"Not only serious objections, but I want it stopped—emphatically, stopped!" Trimbal Thackera replied. "You are not a fit associate for my daughter, and I will have the acquaintance utterly and forever ended. You rescued her, and I am willing to reward you, but henceforth I forbid you my house, and you will consult your best interests by keeping as far out of

the neighborhood as possible. Will a hundred dollars satisfy your demands?"

Lawton laughed, dryly.

"I am not aware of having made any demands, nor that I am particularly in need of a hundred dollars. And as for your daughter, Miss Theodora, I entertain for her the highest regard, and have not the slightest idea of withdrawing my attentions, as long as they may be, by her, favorably received. Therefore, it remains for you to say whether or not our interview is at an end."

"Indeed!" and Thackera looked as if he could have killed his audacious visitor, with a good will. "You seem inclined to carry matters with a high hand, and suit yourself?"

"I do, you may rest assured, so far as my personal interests are concerned. Because you chance to be a lawyer and a reputedly wealthy man, it does not signify that I should do just as you say. If your daughter cares for me, as I have reason to believe she does, I shall not hesitate to say that I shall seek to win her, no matter what your objections may be."

"You will, eh?"

"I will, most assuredly!"

"Very well. We shall see how you will succeed. Why, you must be mad, for an instant to suppose that I would tolerate an alliance between my daughter and a dirty pauper like you!"

"Sir!"

Lawton arose, quickly, his face stern, his eyes gleaming revengefully, as they gazed at the man, who had insulted him. "I demand that you retract that insult. I am no pauper, nor will I allow any man to call me one. If you do not retract the insult I shall consider myself justified in calling you to account!"

"I'll retract nothing!" Thackera declared, also arising. "Instead, I will repeat it, and order you to leave my office at once, or I'll call in an officer, and have you ejected!"

"No! you will not!" Lou replied, sternly. "If you attempt to touch that electric alarm, I'll mount you, and mop the floor with you. Moreover, if you do not retract the insulting word, in five minutes, by the clock, on yonder mantle, it will be the worse for you, irrespective of what the results may be to me. I'll show you that I am a man!"

And, to emphasize his purpose he intruded his stalwart figure between the stock-broker and the electric bell, which connected with the Central Police Station.

Thus cut off from the alarm, the broker stood glaring at his youthful enemy in intense anger not unmixed with fear.

"Curse you! lay a hand on me, and I'll have you sent to prison!" he gritted.

"Then, retract your words, and save the inevitable results!" Lawton responded, grimly. "It is your best policy."

"Never, sir! never. I will not retract a word, and if you dare to lay a violent hand on me I will devote my life to securing your ruin. I'll spend every cent I own, but what you shall be ruined—scorned and derided, until you will be only too glad to hide your face from God and mankind!"

"Three minutes!" Lawton called out. "You have but two left, in which to save yourself. No matter what you may threaten, my resolve is firm and unalterable!"

"Curse you! curse you!" was all the response Trimbal Thackera made, while he stood there, as rigid as a statue, white-faced, passionate.

One would have formed the opinion, to look at him, that he was more eager to be struck by this son of toil than otherwise. But, if eager, the eagerness was surely born of a desire for revenge.

So he stood, unyielding, until the hands of the clock indicated that the five minutes grace had expired, when without a word the young knight of the ash-cart advanced, and with the celerity and certainty of an accomplished pugilist, struck Trimbal Thackera two blows, full in the face, which had the effect to carry the victim clean off his feet.

Then, scarcely deigning the broker a second glance, Lawton strode from the office, leaving Thackera lying where he had fallen.

And it was unlucky for him, as after events will prove, that he departed as quickly as he did.

CHAPTER II.

A GABBY GAMIN CALLED WRINKLES.

AMONG the sons of toil with whom Lou Lawton's labors associated him he was universally respected and admired for his integrity and sterling principles, and that he had an enemy in the world was the least of his concern.

Insult as gross as that which had been offered

by the insolent Thackera was one of the few things which he had no disposition to tolerate; yet he was not two blocks from the lawyer's office ere he rather regretted that he had been so hasty and severe.

"Maybe I've made myself trouble," he mused, "but, even if I have, I believe the man deserved more than I gave him. He is an insulting and overbearing swell-head, and thought to intimidate me, simply because I was poor and a workman. I've no doubt about one thing, however: he is just villainous and revengeful enough to try to injure me to the full extent of his power. But I doubt if he will succeed very well. He cannot more than procure my discharge, and I'm solid for a new job 'most anywhere that I am known."

And thus reflecting, he strode from the vicinity of the office, little mistrusting that more ill was destined to come to him than his mere discharge from employment.

For, in truth, it would not be easy to lose him his job, as he owned his horse and cart, and was hired by a contractor.

But while we are leaving him returning to his work, let us look back into Trimbal Thackera's office.

The blow struck by the young owner of the ash-cart had been with greater force than he had intended, and, as a consequence, when the broker struck the floor it was in an insensible condition.

There he lay, outstretched upon his back, reminding one more of a dead man than of one with a bit of breath in his body.

The concussion of his head with the floor also caused a tiny thread of crimson to ooze out of one of his ears.

Lawton had not been gone from the office five minutes, when another person came along down the street and entered.

He was a young man, probably twenty-two or three years of age, built with that fashionable evenness necessary to a society man; was fairly good-looking in face, and dressed with faultless elegance, even to being coated and capped in sealskin.

His face was round and rosy, his eyes brown, his hair and mustache of a sandy hue, his general bearing easy and self-possessed.

He entered the main office with the air of a casual caller, and, not seeing any one about, stepped toward the door of the inner office, which was open.

Then he saw the broker lying outstretched upon the floor.

"Hello! what does this mean? Foul play, I wonder?" the visitor exclaimed, quickly advancing and kneeling beside the "knocked out" man. "Humph! some one's been slugging him, I should say, judging by this discoloration over the eye—knocked him clean off his base. Wonder who did it, and what the object was?"

He arose, without any attempt to restore Thackera to his senses, and glanced sharply about the office.

"No one's here, and it's evident that, whoever's been exercising his muscle at uncle's expense, has taken leave. There are no indications, either, that a robbery has taken place, as I can see."

He took a pocket-book from the broker's inside pocket, and saw that it contained money to the amount of several hundred dollars, together with some papers.

These the young man did not take time to examine, but put the wallet into his own pocket, with a quiet chuckle.

"The money will come in handy, to help me square my last night's obligations, and the old gent will never suspect his dutiful nephew, Vose Van Vetchin, of having 'pinched' it. Oh! no—not he! He thinks me a calendar saint, or something of the kind, and I'm quite willing that he should keep on thinking so. When he comes back to his senses, and misses his wallet, he will naturally put the theft on whoever assaulted him, and raise a smell that will rival the perfumes of the aromas of Stygia. I wonder if he has got any other money receptacles lying around handy?"

He was about to begin an investigation when he heard the door of the outer office open, and some one enter.

Instantly he seized a glass of water from a side table, knelt beside the broker, and began bathing his forehead and discolored eye, with the greatest apparent solicitude.

In a moment more the person who had entered the outer office, darkened the doorway of the inner one, where he paused and gazed at the tableau presented with no little surprise.

The new arrival was a boy, or more appropriately, in street vernacular, a "kid."

He was about sixteen years old, and a typical specimen of the irrepressible gamin.

Considering his age, he was pretty solidly built, although not quite the average height of boys of sixteen.

In face he was not particularly handsome—yet his was a good-natured countenance, frank, open and rather saucy, with large mouth, shrewd eyes, and light-brown hair, which was worn clipped short, prize-fighter fashion. With a clean face, the boy would not have been counted homely; but then, his face and soap and water were evidently often on the "outs."

His garments were also typical of his position in life. The pants were not only ragged, but were the cast-off raiment of some large-proportioned man, and had to be rolled up at the bottom, and drawn in at the waist, to keep them from falling off the wearer.

His shoes were old, and likewise too large for him, while his shirt, coat and cap, were much the worse for wear.

Slung over his shoulder by a strap, was a bootblackening outfit, which indicated his vocation.

Such was the person who stood in the doorway of the office, and with his hands thrust into his pockets, surveyed the scene within the inner office, with a speculative squint of the left eye.

Pretending to be unaware of the bootblack's presence, Van Vetchin continued his bathing exercise, until, owing to the new arrival's continued silence, he felt constrained to look up.

"Ah! hello! What are you doing here?" he demanded, impatiently. "What is your business?"

"Polishin' promulgators!" was the retort. "Want thet aire stiff's shoes shined?"

"Stiff!" Van Vetchin echoed. "This man is not dead, you fool."

"Ain't, eh? Tho't mebbe he was. See'd yer swabbin' off. Who slugged him?"

"I don't know. I only arrived here a moment before you came, and found him lying as you see him. Some one must have struck him a powerful blow, and then fled. It's too bad."

"It does look ruther rum," the bootblack said. "Know him?"

"Certainly. He is my uncle."

"Oh! he is? What's yer name?"

"What's that your business? You're too inquisitive altogether. What brings you here, anyhow?"

"These 'ere pair o' sev's!" and the boy indicated his shabbily-clad feet. "Maybe you'll be askin' fer my bizness card next. So I'll accommodate you!"

And fishing from his pocket a piece of white pasteboard, which had once formed a part of a box, he tossed it upon the floor near the young man.

"Thar! that's me 'skutcheon, wi' nary blot on't," he said, with a grin. "Thet tells ye jest as much about me as hist'ry itself."

Van Vetchin glanced at the card, without deigning to pick it up, for he had a pious disgust for street gamins and their peculiarities, from the fact that they frequently yelled "Dude!" after him.

The words upon the card were a painful attempt at chirographical pen-print, and the spelling correspondingly poor.

WRINKLES,

PERFESHOENIL LANDSCAPE ARTISTE

IN SHOO BLACKIN'!!!

KOARNS REMOOVED 'THOUT PANE.

HOME,

RAM-KAT ALL'Y.

Van Vetchin desined the card one glance, and then gave vent to a snort of disgust.

"You're a fool!" he growled.

"Thet's twice you've called me that!" Wrinkles retorted, "an' ef I hed a bananner, I'd give it to yer, fer the compliment. It takes a smart feller ter make a fool, ye know. But, say, you'n' me won't scrap. Jest ye scrub away on yer uncle, an' fetch him tew Limerick, an' while ye'r' at it, let me hev the job ov puttin' a nickel-plate finish, on them shoes."

"You get out—get out of this office, or I'll call a policeman!" Van Vetchin cried, angrily. "D'ye hear?"

"No! I'm as deaf as a dynamite factory, w'ot never heers ye comin' along, 'til ye run slap ag'in' et. Hope ye don't think the perlice is afeard o' me! Phew! no! I'm a reg'lar walk-in' plug o' terbacco, an' they gives me the borry fer a bite, every time we crosses each other's meridian. But say, dog-gone it, ye'r' mean, you aire. Ye c'u'd steer me on to a ten cent shine,

jest as easy as chawin' cheese, an' make yer uncle pay fer it. Tell ye what I'll do, ter encourage bizness: You give me yer uncle's feet fer a dime, an' I'll add you in, and call the job fifteen cents. How's that fill yer eye?"

"Will you leave this office?" the broker's nephew demanded, fiercely, as he sprung to his feet. "If you don't—"

Just at this juncture, Trimbal Thackera opened his eyes, and then sat up, abruptly.

With his uninjured optic, he took in the situation, at a glance.

"What's the trouble, here?" he demanded, in anger.

"Why, you see, uncle, I found you lying on the floor, here!" Van Vetchin said, "and was endeavoring to restore you to consciousness, when this young vagabond came in, and began to harass me for permission to black your boots. I, of course refused him, and have ordered him to clear out, but he stubbornly refuses to go."

Thackera turned his glaring gaze upon Wrinkles, with an imprecation.

"Why do you not go, when you are told?" he fiercely cried.

"Because I hain't got ready!" Wrinkles replied, good-naturedly. "I hain't did me errand yet, an' then, too, I didn't allow this young feller hed any say 'bout whether I had to go, or not!"

"Confound your impudence—why, I never heard the like of it!"

"Ye didn't? Hain't been around much, then, I reckon. I ain't a flea-bite 'long o' some o' ther kids."

In a passion, Trimbal Thackera regained his feet.

"Well, I'll check it!" he cried. "Now, do you get out of this office, instant, or by Heaven I'll slat your brains out on the floor."

"But, say, boss, jest hold yer horses a bit. Ain't ye goin' ter give a feller a chance ter do his errand?"

"Errand? What errand, confound you?"

"Oh! an important one!" and the gamin looked wise. "Reckon you an' I hed better have a private interview, 'ca'se my bizness is teetotally unintended for other ears than yers!"

"Bosh! nonsense! You're lying to gain time, so you can steal something. I am up to your pranks. Come! get!"

"All right for you, then; I'll go. 'Tain't anything as 'll make me rich or poor. Kinder hate ter start out on an errand, tho', an' hev ter go back 'thout doin' things up brown. Tra-la-lee-lum! Hope next time we meet, you'll have your other eye painted somber!"

With this parting shot, Wrinkles made a grand scoot for the street, expecting that Thackera's boot might assist him, materially, in his flight.

The broker made no more dangerous demonstration, however, than to utter a cry of vexation.

"Hold up there!" he cried; "come back, you whelp, if you have any errand or word for me. And mind you, state your business promptly, and briefly."

"Oh! I kin spin it off at the rate of half a yard per second, only et hes ter bedid in private. Ye don't ketch this snoozer tellin' no important secrets in ther presence of any dude thet will cheat a seal out o' its skin—no sir-ee!"

"Look out, you young vagabond, how you cast your remarks about me!" Van Vetchin cried, flushing florid, "or I'll have you thrashed within an inch of your life, sir!"

"You will!" Wrinkles ejaculated, contemptuously. "Why, me purty gilly, I ain't ther least bit afeard of you. Every kid along ther street is onto you, an' there's a society of the roughest ones organizin' ter take yer up ter Point Breeze an' throw ye in the tar-ditch."

"No more of this nonsense!" Trimbal Thackera cried, authoritatively. "Vose, allow me to excuse you for a few minutes, until I see what this rat has to say."

"All right, uncle; I'll drop in again after a bit then!" and without any show of demur, the broker's nephew took his departure.

As soon as the outer office door was closed upon him, Thackera turned upon his shabbily-attired, but self-possessed visitor, with a frown.

"Now, boy, state your errand and do it in as few words as possible. Have you a message for me?"

"You kin bet your 'puts' and 'calls' I hev," Wrinkles replied, with an effulgent grin—"or, at least, I hev a message fer Trimbal Thackera, if you're him!"

"I am Trimbal Thackera. If you have a message, let me have it at once."

"Oh! et ain't on paper," the boy assured,

"leastwise anyhow I ain't got no paper. Yer see the paper blowed out o' my hand, an' took a quiet sneak inter a sewer inlet!"

"Furies take you for your carelessness! How do you expect me to know what message was sent, then? Who sent it? Explain, or I'll brain you!"

"Oh! git out! Don't levy so much grudge ag'in my brains. They don't take up so much room as me feet, nohow. But, ter go on. Ye see, I were prospectin' along a cert'in up-town bowlin'varde this afternoon, fer shines, when a gal poked her head out o' a 'ristocratic three-story windy, an' sings out, 'Hillo! bub!' Now, when any one calls me 'bub,' it allus hurts me corns, an' so, seein' the gal were a Holstein, fer good lucks, I sung back, 'How ye was, sis? Wat'll ye hev, wi' vanilla in et?' Then, she told me to wait, an' she cum down to the door, an' axed me would I like to bounce onto a Bland? I told her nix, but I had a two-ton hunger for greenbanks. So we struck a bargain, by which I was ter become a walkin' Adams Express Company, an' convey to you a note, written on a sheet uv paper that smelt uv love among the hot-beds, an' hed little two-fer-a-penny fellers in the corner, wi' Injun bows an' arrows in their hands, as ef they were on the shoot! Guess ye call 'em Cupids, don't yer?"

"Go on!" Thackera said, impatiently, yet seeing plainly that it was little use to hurry the young irrepressible.

"Well, anyhow," Wrinkles proceeded, "we hit the bargain. The letter was a conglomeration of crow-tracks, an' hed no envelope, but the young lady didn't 'pear to care, an' so as I cum along, I took a sniff o' the perfumery, an' read what them crow-tracks sed!"

"What! you read phonetic hand!" the broker ejaculated, in unconcealed astonishment.

"Bet yer bonds an' mortgages I do!" was the reply. "I've bin takin' a quiet sneak into the night schools, when I could, wi' an idea o' makin' a canvas 'mong my customers fer mayor. Well, arter I had read the note, an' were goin' to stuff it into my pocket, along cum a forty-ton January gust, an' tho' I yeld, 'Whoa, January!' the gust didn't heer me, fer it gobbled onto that billy-doo, an' waltzed et inter the sewer. But, ye see, I remember what it sed on that note!"

"Then, out with it, without any more gab!"

"Oh! you bet! It sed:

"DEAR TRIMBAL:—Do not fail ter come ter-night. It's a new goose, full o' feathers, an' needs plucking. Truly yours,

"ROSAMOND."

"Oh! you bet, that's what et sed!"

And Wrinkles looked inquiringly at the broker!

CHAPTER III.

WRINKLES DRIVES A BARGAIN.

THERE was something so significant in the gamin's closing words, that in spite of an effort to appear perfectly composed, Trimbal Thackera was visibly startled.

Did the boy mean anything?

He was not just prepared to arrive at a conclusion on this score. He saw that Wrinkles was shrewd, quick-witted, and observant—such a street-educated waif as it would puzzle many an experienced man to deal with, except at the boy's own terms and happy-go-lucky way of doing business.

"Well," he said, after a short silence, "is that all! If so, you can go."

"Oh! I ain't in no partic'lar hurry," and Wrinkles dropped complacently into an arm-chair. "Bizness ain't b'ilin' this afternoon, and if there's anything I like ter do, it's to hev a chat with some high-flyer like yerself. Then, too, I hev'n't got done yet."

"Not done! Well, what else do you want?" And the broker seated himself, despairing of getting rid of his precocious visitor.

"Well, you see, I'm in fer a little bizness myself, an' I want yer, or some other big gun, ter give me a boost. Reckon how you'll kinder sour onto the idea at first, but it don't make no difference—you'll sweeten up when yer cum ter know what I want."

"If you want alms, go to those whose business it is to care for the poor," Thackera growled, picking up a pen. "I've neither time nor inclination to bother with beggars."

"Hain't! Well, now, mebbe ye ain't rushin' matters! I hain't even hinted the desire ter gobble onto a cent. What I want is a lift inter bizness. You bet ther ain't nothin' shrimp-size 'bout me! Nothin' short of a clean set-out will suit yours truly. S'pose mebbe ye'r 'quainted wi' the Percival Brothers, general warehouse-

Thackera looked up from his writing, with an odd expression of countenance.

"Well, what of them?" he demanded.

"Lots!" Wrinkles assured, fishing a cigar-butt from his pocket and lighting it. "How'd it fill yer eye ter give me a letter o' interduckshun an' recommendation to them? Yer got good standin' on 'Change, an' aire a purty big 'bull,' an' they'd be apt ter smile on me wi' favor."

"A letter of introduction? Why, I don't understand you. What do I know about a young vagabond like you, and why should I give you a letter?"

"Fer charity's sake—jest ter give me a boost toward ther apex uv glitterin' fortune. Why, sum day I might turn a flip-flap inter ther presidential chair, an' could give ye a yank into the Senate."

"Nonsense! I'll listen to no more of this sort of trash!"

"But, wait; I hain't explained yet. Ye see, Percival Brothers hev advertised fer a good, honest, wide-awake night-watchman. Now, that fills my eye beautiful! I'm jest the ham ter fit that pertic'lar sandwich, I am. Gittin' too big fer wrasslin' mud off o' brogans, ye see, an' thet job o' night-watchin' would hit me right where I live. All yer got ter do is write me out a reckermend, on gilt-edge paper, an' I'll hustle right up an' levy onto the job. If I git ter be partner in the biz 'fore the year's out, I'll send ye a gold gimlet when yer silver weddin' comes off."

"I can give no such a recommend or letter of introduction, as you require; so do not bother me, but take your departure!" Thackera returned, impatiently. "I've told you to go now for the last time!"

"You have? Gosh! but I'm glad o' that. I was wonderin' if you hadn't got tired of it. But you see, boss, I'm goin' to have thet letter before I move a peg!"

"Well! well! The like of your impudence I never heard. How do you expect to get the letter when I positively refuse to give it to you?"

"Oh, you'll give it to me. If you don't, I'll squeal!"

"You'll squeal?" the broker echoed.

"You bet—squeal like a stuck pig. Yer see, boss, I'm wantin' the job bad, an' you could help me ter git it wi'out any trouble. So, if you are so mean as not ter give a feller a boost when it won't cost you a cent, I'm jest ther kid as will go fer ye like hot cakes—an' my name is Wrinkles, perfeshional landscape-fresco fiddler in shoe-black!"

The gamin's manner was becoming more impudent and independent. It was clear that he thought he had the broker to some extent in his power, and meant to improve the advantage.

"You infernal young whelp, what do you mean by addressing me in this manner?" Thackera cried, greatly angered as well as somewhat disturbed by the threat. "Speak, or I'll fire this inkstand at you!"

"If you do, I'll catch it," Wrinkles replied, with a grin. "I heer ther's talk o' offerin' me a posish as ketcher fer the Athletic team. As fer what I mean, boss, I'll give ye a straight pointer that I ain't so green as you may take me to be. I know that I've got the dead-wood on you, an' if you don't help me ter git the job I want, why, I'm goin' to show ye that even a boy sometimes has power as big as a elefant!"

"Bah! You can't scare me by any of your threats. Why, I've a mind—"

"Now, see here, let up an' I'll convince you that I ain't gassin'. In the first place, I know that place on North Twelfth street, where I got the message, is crooked—that is, it is one of the most prosperous and well-patronized gambling-houses in Philadelph. No one goes there but ther finest, an' ef I was to lead a raid on the roost, I reckon the mayor would captur' enuff tools ter set up er ranch of his own."

The boy's declaration had caused Trimbal Thackera to look still more uneasy, but he refrained from giving vent to his feelings.

So Wrinkles went on, with the consciousness that he had gained a point. In reality, he knew no more about the Twelfth street house than he did about the ancient city of Jerusalem. He had made a "blind," more intuitively than otherwise; but he knew, after he had uttered the charge, that he had not hit wide of the truth.

"In the second place," he said, "I'm onto the fact thet Rosamond, who's purtier than a ten thousand dollar beauty, hes been investin' in geese, an' perposes ter have a pickin'-bee, ter-night. In other words, a 'sucker' hes bin entrapped inter 'the jint,' an' she an' you calculate ter fleece him out of his lucre, and then

give him the G. B. Ha! ha! You see I'm onto ye, heel an' toe-nail, an' ef I don't git the job, wi' Percival Brothers, look out fer a raid on the Twelfth street shebang, when yer least expect it! That ain't all, neither. Awhile ago, there was a big up-town weddin', an' now you sport around in a gay barouche, wi' a purty wife, beside ye. Bet ten cents to a terrapin—if the new Missus Thack know'd about that Twelfth street—"

"Stop!" Trimbal Thackera commanded, rapping upon his office table. "Enough of this, boy—enough, I say. I don't want to hear any more of it. You're an insolent young black-mailer, and ought to be sent to the penitentiary. However, despite your rascality, I see you are shrewd, and might make a smart man if properly trained; so I will not deal as harshly with you, as I otherwise would do. Of course your charge about the Twelfth street residence is absurd and preposterous, as a highly respectable old Quaker family reside there. Nevertheless, were you to attempt to black-mail me, to my estimable wife, it might engender an unpleasantness not easy to dissipate. Therefore, I am inclined, for this reason alone, to yield to your infernal tongue, and mind your own business, and I'll give you the letter to Percival, and a hundred dollars, besides."

"All right, old Blackstone! I'm yer Isaacs on that bargain, tho' I don't want nothin' but the letter. I've got a few dollars salted away up in the Spring Garden Savings Bank, and am as indepent as a billionaire. I promise—an' all I ax is the letter."

Without reply the broker wrote rapidly, upon a letter sheet, and in a few moments, handed to Wrinkles, for inspection, this missive:

"PERCIVAL BROS. & Co:—

"GENTLEMEN:—I cheerfully recommend the boy who brings this to you, as being one who would fill your wants for a night-watchman, satisfactorily."

"T. THACKERA."

"Guess that will do," Wrinkles said, with an appreciative nod. "Much obleeged to you, an' ef I turn that flip-flop into the Presidentshe chair, cum aroun' an' waltz wi' me at the inaugural hoe-down. Don't want a first-class duplex-action patent-leather shine, afore I go?"

"No!"

"All right. Guess I'll meander, then. Give my grip ter Rosamond, an' tell her ther next time she works me fer a Adams express car, I'll try not ter deliver ther consignment inter ther sewer. By-by!"

And rising, he left the office, with a broad grin upon his dirty countenance.

After his departure, Trimbal Thackera's demeanor underwent a change. His face became strangely distorted with passion which he had hitherto held in check, and he smote the table fiercely, with his fist.

"Curses seize that boy!" he hissed, rancorously—"curse him! curse him! He's as sharp and smart as a veteran detective. I wonder how he came to find out about Rosa's place! It's a bad thing. He might make a deal of trouble, and bring me into deep disgrace, for he is just as willful and independent as he is shrewd. He wasn't a bit bashful about driving me to accept of his own terms. However, perhaps, after all, he'll not trouble me any more, if he gets the job at Percival's. For the present, I've got something else to attend to."

He was reminded of this fact by a twinge of pain about his left eye, which was considerably swollen, and not a little discolored, from the effect of Lou Lawton's stunning right-hander.

The sight of it, as the broker surveyed himself in a glass, caused him to swear, fiercely.

"By the furies, the ruffian shall pay dearly for this job!" he hissed, grating his teeth. "I'll lose every cent I own but what he shall suffer to my satisfaction, for this brutality!"

Without delay, he telephoned his family physician, who arrived soon, and set to work reducing the discoloration and swelling. This process was so successfully accomplished, that, within a couple of hours' time, no one would have known that the broker had been the victim of a "slug," but for a faint red spot upon his cheek-bone.

And it was not until the broker felt in his pocket for his wallet, to pay the doctor, that he discovered his loss.

"Furies! I have been robbed! Not content with having knocked me down, the low-lived scoundrel has stolen my pocketbook!"

He did not utter these words aloud; instead, he went calmly to his safe, as if nothing had occurred, procured other money, paid the doctor, and that worthy departed.

"Now, for my revenge!" Thackera gritted, his rage knowing no bounds. "If that dirty whelp sleeps outside of prison to-night, it will

be because there's not enough officers in Philadelphia to find him."

Putting on his overcoat, he locked his office, and hurried away toward the Central Police Station, at Fifth and Chestnut streets.

The day was cold and bleak, with no snow upon the ground, and a piercing wind was blowing from the northwest.

Thackera had no time to mind the cold, however. He was burning with feverish anger—had but one all-absorbing thought. That was, to vent his spite upon the young knight of the cart, who had not only brought him so much personal discomfiture, but had also, as he had not a doubt in his mind, robbed him of his wallet.

On reaching the police station, he lost no time in applying to Magistrate South, and swearing out a warrant for the arrest of Louis Lawton, on the charge of felonious assault and battery.

The magistrate looked a little surprised, as he heard the name of the accused.

"Lawton?" he said—"Lawton, ash-cart driver?"

"Exactly. Do you know him? Has he been here before?" Trimbal Thackera demanded, eagerly.

"He has, but not under arrest. He has brought several evil-doers to our notice, and in his division, has a great deal of political influence."

"I can't help that. He is a low-lived puppy, and a thief, and if prompt measures are not taken for his arrest, I'll know the reason why!" Thackera hotly declared.

"I will see that the case is properly attended to," the magistrate replied, briefly. "It is not likely to be a hard job to find the young man."

Somewhat pacified, Trimbal Thackera took his departure.

In passing from the room, he did not deign to notice a ragged urchin, lurking about the doorway.

It was, it is needless to say, Wrinkles.

He was, it may be added, a privileged character about the Central Station.

Always alert, bright, observant and accommodating, he had won the favor of nearly all the officials in State House Row, and his airy freedom about that judicial place was seldom if ever interfered with.

And Wrinkles, seeing Thackera enter the magisterial apartment, was near at hand, and overheard the swearing out of the warrant, accusing Lou Lawton not only of assault and battery, but also theft.

"It's a dog-goned shame," the gamin muttered. "I know Lou, an' mebbe he did slug his ribs, but he wouldn't steal—less he war ter 'pinch' a pair uv old breeches from a billy goat;—for, be it known, Lou, with the thrift of his class, usually looked sharp for old rags, in making his rounds, and derived no little benefit from their sale. 'So they're goin' ter haul Lou up fer stealin', aire they? Now, I wonder ef they aire?'"

And giving his head a reflective dig, the young "Arab" skurried out upon the street, and away from the vicinity on a dog-trot.

He was going in quest of Lou.

CHAPTER IV.

AT SNYE'S EMPORIUM.

FOR LOU Lawton our young gamin hero had a keen liking. The two had been acquaintances ever since Wrinkles could remember, which was at least nine years before, when the urchin, a miserable little waif, had first made his debut upon the street as a newsboy.

It was young Lawton, then but a bootblack himself, who had given Wrinkles the few cents to start into business, and the lad had never forgotten the fact.

The two often met, as the years rolled on, and exchanged confidences, and had, on more than one occasion, shared the same bed.

Therefore, when Wrinkles heard of the danger that menaced the cartman, he at once resolved to give him timely warning, so that, should he wish to make any beforehand arrangements he could do so.

Lawton's collection route was so irregular that Wrinkles had no hopes of finding him until he should turn in for the night; but as the afternoon was then far advanced, the gamin thought to find Lawton at the stable by the time he reached it himself.

The stable was located on South Broad below Washington avenue, and from the Central Station this was a long walk; but, used to being on his feet from morning until night, Wrinkles covered the distance in a short time.

It was dusk when he reached the stable, in a very anxious mood, for knowing the rapidity of

police telegraph service, he feared that the officers had already preceded him, and secured their victim.

To his great relief, however, when he arrived he found young Lawton just in the act of uncoupling his horse from the cart.

"Hello! is that you Wrinkles?" he sung out, with his accustomed cheeriness. "What in the world brings you this far south, so late?"

"Bizness!" Wrinkles answered, sitting down upon his box, and putting considerable emphasis to his speech. "When you're thru' I want interview you!"

"What about, Wrinkles?"

"Oh! I want to make a date with you for a slugging match!" was the dry reply. "Hurry your shanks, for the air is malarious about here. D'ye understand?"

"I think I do!" was the reply.

Lawton turned his horse over to a stable-hand, and rejoined Wrinkles within five minutes.

"Well, chummy, now go ahead!" he said.

"Not till we git out into a new neighborhood," the boy replied. And, seizing his box, he led the way from the stable.

In a short time, by rapid walking, they were in a neighborhood that neither often frequented; then Wrinkles slackened pace, and they walked eastward more leisurely.

The gamin maintained a grim silence, however, and Lawton did not seem particularly inclined to set the irrepressible talking-machine into motion.

Finally, the grim, cold walls of Moyamensing prison loomed up ahead; then Wrinkles turned his dirt-begrimed face directly upon his companion.

"See yonder?" he demanded, pointing toward the "Bastille." "Waal, there's where you'll spend a couple of months, mebbe, providin' ye'r caught. D'ye know it?"

Lawton laughed.

"Well, no. I can't say that I am aware of the fact. It takes a pretty big job to send a man there for more than a few hours."

"Allee samee, if you allow yourself to be gobbled up, there's where you'll go. There's a warrant out for your arrest."

"I am not surprised to hear that," Lou replied good-naturedly, as if the fact did not concern him much. "I've been expecting arrest."

"Then, yer slugged old Thackera, hey?"

"He called me a pauper, and I knocked him down."

"Bully fer you! You did the job up brown, too. I drapped in, awhile afterward, to dispose of some Chicago and Nor'western five-per cents—"

"Whoa! let up! That will do for a starter!" Lou expostulated, laughingly.

"Well, anyhow," Wrinkles went on, "I drapped inter Trimbal's offis, about an hour after you hit him, an' he war layin' on the floor, clean knocked out. A young dude, who claimed ter be his nephew, was waterin' his eye, which looked as if a mule's fist had kicked him. But say, Lou, ye didn't steal the money, did ye?"

"Steal the money?" young Lawton quickly echoed, in great astonishment. "Certainly not. What do you mean?"

"I mean that the warrant charges that you not only sat severely down onter Trimbles Thack's eyebrow, but yer 'pinched' his pocket-book."

Lawton uttered an ejaculation of indignation, at once concluding that the extra charge preferred against him was a scheme on the part of the broker to get even with him.

"This is infamous!" he cried, his face flushing. "I did not touch the old rascal's money, and he has put up this job on me in order to get square. The moment after I hit him I turned and left the office. But I did not touch his pocketbook, money, nor anything else."

"I believe ye, there!" Wrinkles agreed, heartily; "fer I allus found ye square an' honest. But whether ye did, or whether ye didn't, the charge is ag'in' you, an' the officers is on the lookout for ye. Ef ye'r arrested, it'll be hard fer ye ter prove ye didn't take the pocketbook, an' I'm bettin' ten cents ter a terrapin ye git sent up fer six months, if not longer."

"They haven't got me yet," Lawton said, slowly. "I'm not guilty of this alleged theft, and am not inclined to go to prison for it."

"Bully for you! That's why I come in search of you, and waltzed you away from yer haunts."

Wrinkles then went on, and recounted his experiences of that day, to which narration Lawton listened attentively.

"You're a sharp'un, Wrinkles," he said. "It

looks very much as though you had really stumbled onto a gambling-den. As for Trimbal Thackera, I am of the belief that there are many points about his life that would not bear investigation. Did you apply for the job, at Percival Brothers?"

"Yes. I begin work to-morrow night. To-night is the only night I shall be at liberty."

"What do you propose to do about the Twelfth street matter—keep mum?"

"Dunno. Hain't made any calkylations, yit,* and the gamin scratched his head, reflectively. "Fu'st of all, I want see you out o' trouble."

"Don't worry about me. I'll manage to get out of it, somehow."

"But, how? Will you surrender?"

"I think not, unless I have to. As you say, if I am brought before the magistrate, the prospects are I'd get a tough sentence. I can't prove I *didn't* steal the pocketbook, and then, too, Thackera is rich and influential, and he'll work hard to secure my conviction."

"And, if you don't git arrested you'll have to keep shady."

"I suppose so!"

"An' that would be about ther same as 'knowl-agin' ye tuk the money."

"I have thought of that!" Lawton assented, gravely. "I'm in a bad box, either way. Out of jail I shall be a hunted man, sure enough. On the other hand, it may be said that when a man goes to prison for robbery, his prospects are forever after blighted."

"Et luks a good deal that way, sure enuff," Wrinkles assented, soberly. "Ef it was me, an' I was ter take my choice of the two evils, I think I'd ruther rusticate outside uv Moya, than inside."

"I am of the same opinion. One thing is certain—I shall avoid arrest, as long as possible. But, where shall I hide?"

"Nowheres. Betwixt you an' me, I can fix that all right, ef we can reach South street, 'thout gettin' nabbed."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, ye see, I know a chap there, who fixes up 'crooks' so their own mothers wouldn't know 'em. He's a fly rooster—runs a sort o' pawn-broker junk-shop, keeps a poker-room up-stairs, on the quiet, an' ef a 'crook' wants shelter, he can git it there. This man, Jim Snye, knows I'm onter his racket, an' stands in holy terror of me, lest I give him away. When I go by, he always calls me in, gives me a handful o' fifteen cent cigars—they're corkers, too!—and tells me as how I'm a good boy. So, I reckon it's on account o' them cheap smokes thet I've allus kept mum. We'll amble around there, on the quiet, an' Snye will fix ye up so ye can walk right into the Central Station, without being recko'nized."

"Are you sure?"

"You bet! He dassn't refuse for fear I'd pull him in. Oh! cully, ye kin talk about yer big guns, wo't live in big style, an' ride in their indervidjule cars, but we young-uns knows a thing or two, once in awhile, ef we be no bigger nor a shrimp."

"You've got a great head, Wrinkles!"

"Mebbe I hev, but 'tain't fist-proof, so don't yer go firin' away at et, like ye did Trimbles's. Hev ye got any money?"

"None with me—and, what I have got, is where I can't get at it without running the risk of being nabbed."

"How much?"

"Five hundred; but it's safe, however."

"Then let'er slide, till ther polish wears off yer boots. I've a penny or two, an' half's yourn. We'll slide fer South street now."

Lawton did not object. He trusted largely in his gamin friend's sagacity, and would have yielded to his keen judgment in preference to that of many an older person.

So they shaped their course toward South street, but over such a zig-zag route that it would have puzzled a bloodhound to have followed them. Their way lay principally through narrow streets and alleys, and Wrinkles dodged the policeman so well that they encountered but one burly blue-coat, en route to Snye's, and he appeared in no humor to exert himself to arrest anybody.

At Snye's South street emporium they finally arrived and gained entrance by passing up a dark alley and entering at a rear door.

The first apartment entered contained a table, a number of chairs, and a few cheap pictures on the walls.

This was, as Wrinkles informed his friend, the "private parlor."

They seated themselves and in a moment more a loudly-dressed, hook-nosed, ferret-eyed man,

bowed himself into their presence—an individual who was evidently a cross between a Jew and a Frenchman.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," he said, rubbing his hands together, patronizingly. "What can I do for you?"

Wrinkles turned the full light of his beaming countenance upon Mr. Snye.

"Why hello! is that you, Wrinkles?" was the ejaculation. "Why, how you was?" And Snye put forth his hand, which, to keep peace in the family, Wrinkles accepted.

"I'm purty good; how's yerself? In workin' trim to-night?"

"I am always here for business," Snye replied, with an inquiring glance at Lawton.

"All right. I've got a job for you," Wrinkles went on. "If I were to ask you to do me a favor, Snye, how'd et fill yer eye?"

"I'm not blind," was the reply. "Your friend is in trouble?"

"Yes, but he's a rover, free. The lyin'-in-hospital act don't work with him. He wants ter circumnavigate, ye know."

"I understand! I understand!"

"Of course you do. He don't want to know his nearest relative."

"Oh! I can fix him up all right!" the "artist" declared, rubbing his hands. "You know my reputation!"

"Waal! I should bounce a banana!" and Wrinkles literally grinned all over his face.

"What nation does the gentleman most naturally represent?" Snye inquired.

"C'lumjy!" the boy responded. "What'll the charges be, monsignor?"

"Fifty dollare, sare?"

"All right. Send the bill to my office. Understand."

"Perfectly, sare!" Snye answered, with an obsequious bow, that would have done credit to a count.

"Kerect! An' now, Lord Cavanaugh!" the gamin said, turning to Lawton, "this feller will fix ye, an' when ye want yer brogans fixed up, I hang out around Ninth and Chestnut, after nine," and evidently considering further instructions unnecessary, the gamin vanished from Snye's place with astonishing celerity, while Lawton was left to the tender mercies of a man, for whom, to say the least, he had a positive repugnance.

But, it oftentimes happens that a man in a tight fix cannot be a chooser of the circumstances that order his associates or govern his ways.

CHAPTER V.

A DARING EXPERIMENT.

WRINKLES was well aware that Lawton was safe in the hands of Professor Snye, who cared too much for the welfare of himself and his "joint," to run the risk of exposure, which would surely follow, did he attempt to use the young gamin shabbily.

Knowing that the fixing-up operation would occupy at least a couple of hours, Wrinkles had already hit upon a plan of action during that time.

He knew of Theodora Thackera's infatuation for young Lawton, and made up his mind to notify her, at once, if possible, of the true state of affairs, in order, as he reflected, to make Lawton's case "solid."

The Thackera home was located on the north side of the city, though not far distant from the business center; so, jumping on a car, Wrinkles reached the residence in a short time.

It was one of a row of ordinary three-story dwellings; a silver plate upon the door bore the name "Thackera."

"Wonder how the racket will work?" Wrinkles muttered, as he paused at the curbstone, and took a squint up at the house. "If his royal slithers should be to hum, how'm I goin' ter 'scuse myself for callin'? Oh! I know! I'll give him the fiz that I jest called ter let him know I got the job, an' were much obleeged tew him. That would fill his eye, I guess."

So, ascending the steps, he rung the door-bell, in his hand holding an envelope which he had fished from his pocket.

Of course it did not amount to anything in one sense, being old and valueless. In another sense, it did.

Experience had long ago developed one thing to the boy's mind—that the slam-the-door servants of aristocratic households observe more civility, when they see an urchin standing at the door with a letter or package in hand, than when the urchin "shows up" nothing, to indicate the nature of his errand.

Wrinkles had been kicked from doorsteps too many times not to know this fact.

The door of the Thackera residence was opened by a half-grown colored boy, in livery.

"Hillo! Is the boss in, cully? Mister Thackera?"

"No, sah—gone out for the evenin', sah."

"Oh! he hes, hes he? Reckon his daughter is in, hey?"

"Yes, sah!"

"Well, jest you trot along in and tell her there's a gentleman here who wants to see her on the most important bizness. Don't let no Pershin mats grow under yer feet, neither!"

The servant regarded the caller with haughty disdain.

"If you hab a message, sah, give it to me, an' I'll deliver it!" he said, rather severely.

"Oh! no yer don't, me young buddy! This hyer's a clear case o' ninety per cent. private bizness an' I must see ther young lady pussonly an' inderviduously. D'ye understand me, ye ten-cent terrapin? Now mosey an' give the order or I'll put the whites o' yer eyes in mournin'!" threatened the aggressive Wrinkles.

But the colored boy didn't scare.

"Can't see de young missus, sah!" he said, importantly. "She's sick in bed, an' de master give strict orders dat no one was to see her. Good-evenin', sah!" and without further parley, the door was shut and locked.

While Wrinkles gave vent to a grunt of indignation.

"Oh! just wait till I catch that nigger out, some o' these days! I'll knock his two eyebrows into one. An' so, Miss Thack is shut up, is she? an' the old gent ain't goin' ter 'low no Romeos ter see her? Hum! that is some news, anyhow. Wonder what Lawty will say when I tell him about it? Bet he'll git cardinal mad!"

Realizing that there was no use of his hanging around that neighborhood, any longer, Wrinkles set out for Eighth and Chestnut streets, and arrived there within an hour after his leaving South street.

He had to "shine" around, for pretty near another hour, ere Lawton tapped him on the shoulder, and asked to have his boots blacked.

The young cartman had surely undergone a great change. His disguise was that of an elderly gentleman, whose dress indicated that he was a well-to-do citizen. He wore a full beard, and connecting wig, of so clever arrangement, that a person would never have suspected but what the hirsute growth was his own.

"Nice mornin', this evenin'!" Wrinkles remarked, looking up from his box, with a grin. "Travelin', or goin' somewheres?"

"You're entirely too impertinent, boy. Attend to your job, and don't let it trouble you about my business!" was the rebuke, in a tone that in no wise resembled Lawton's.

But Wrinkles was not deceived.

"Oh! cheese it! That won't work wi' me!" he declared. "I know yer, Lawton!"

"How?" was the inquiry.

"Why, by yer feet, of course!" with a wry glance at the man's "understandings." "Can't fool me on feet, no more'n ye can a nigger in a hen-roost. I kin tell yer the State a foot first kicked in the minnit I lays eyes on't. Sech is ther observation o' ther perfesh."

"Well, sir, in what State was I born?"

"Why, that's a New York foot—broad an' monopolistic, yit graceful an' inclined to carry with it the earth. The Penn'a feet aire a leetle off, in grace, an' ye seldom find one thet's 'thout corns. The Jersey fut— But, Lordy, sir, there's no use 'spatiatin' on a Jersey! No, sir-ee! There ain't a gilly in our board o' Trade, even down ter the two-fer-five dago, who can't size up a Jersey foot in a second. Hard ter b'leeve et, mebbe, but the foot of every State has its peculiarity, an' et ain't often we risin' senators makes a mistake in callin' the turn correct."

"You young rats are certainly gabby enough to call the turn upon anything," was the response, this time in Lawton's natural tone. "And, now, what is your programme for the evening?"

"Why, we're going to take a walk. Hev ye got any sugar?"

"Thanks to your friend Snye, yes. He gave me fifty dollare, and assured me it was all right—perfectly right!"

"The snoozer! He knows his brown bread, you bet! It happens lucky he does, too. Now, you waltz over yonder to Castor's, an' buy a bundle of cloth—'nuff fer a suit, if you like—an' then, come back an' hire me to tote it fer you. Tumble? Then we schottische along, till we git in the vicinity o' the Twelfth street 'brace' I was tellin' ye about."

"Why do you wish to go there?"

"Oh! there may be somethin' we can pick up. Any pointer ye can score ag'in' Trimble's, ye

know, may come in handy. Besides, I've somethin' to tell ye, as we go along."

Comprehending that the gamin was really better to lead than himself, Lawton gave his assent, and as soon as his boots were blackened, he crossed to the merchant tailoring establishment Wrinkles had mentioned.

In a short time he returned, carrying a bundle of considerable size, and at once struck up a bargain with the the bootblack, to carry it for him.

Thus, side by side, and owing to the bundle, attracting no particular notice, they journeyed westward.

Wrinkles then narrated the particulars of his visit to the Thackera house.

"Why did you go there, at all?" Lawton demanded, when the gamin had finished.

"Oh! I tho't mebbe the old man would try ter 'queer' you, afore ye got a chance ter see yer doxy-Ann, an' so I tho't it wouldn't hurt a bit fer me to give the gal a pointer, myself."

"And, so you are of the opinion that she is locked up?"

"Yes. The coon said as how it was the boss's orders that she should receive no visitors, an' ef the thing was investigated I'll bet ten cents to a terrapin she's locked up in her bedure."

"No doubt you are right. I'm of the opinion that Trimbal Thackera is nene too good to do a mean act like that. Poor Theo! I must somehow contrive to communicate with her."

"Not to-night. She'll keep all right, for the present, an' no doubt a watch will be kept, from s'posin' you'll try to steal an interview with her. Yer sugar-coated biz is to steer clear o' there, fer the present, an' I'll fix it, after awhile, so you two doves kin meet. An', now, as we near the Twelfth street place, ef anything peculiar happens you be jest as fly as the flocest fly thet ever crawled over the end o' yer nose, in summer time."

"I don't understand you."

"I'll explain. Ye know I told you about a goose goin' to be plucked, there, to-night? Well, first of all, let me tell ye thet ther Directory don't allow thet any 'Rosamond' lives there, but instead one Priscilla Peg, spinster."

"Well, what of that?"

"An' an oldish woman was buried from the place, 'bout six months ago, whe, no doubt, was the identical Peg, pegged out. Well, now, I've hearn hinted as how bizness men hed been decoyed inter some place nigh here an' came out, short. Anyhow, when we git there, I'm goin' to try a 'speriment. There's a street lamp in front o' the place, an' I'm goin' to stop, there, and give yer boots another shine. Meantime, yer ter be lookin' up to the houses, an' tellin' as how you wonder which is which. You hadn't been there, in a year, and had jest fergot which one was the one yer' lookin' fer."

"Then, I ax ye if ye remember the name, an' you will allow it was 'Peg,' an' I'll say I never heard of sech a person. About this time, mebbe you'll be 'vited in. Ef you are, play yer game fine, see the 'elefant,' an' so forth, not fergittin' to keep an eye on the 'goose'. I'll be in the neighborhood when you come out. Ef anything happens, an' they try to go fer you, smash a windy, an' yell 'Cully!' an' I'll come to ther rescue."

"Wrinkles, you're a trump!"

"But one lone trump ain't much. Hev ye got the nerve to try it?"

"If anything of the nature you have outlined occurs, you bet I'm in for it!" Lawton declared, heartily. "But, boy, do you think my disguise perfect?"

"Yer biggest creditor wouldn't know ye!"

In a short time they reached their destination, and halted beneath the light of the street-lamp.

Wrinkles was on his knees in front of Lawton in an instant, and polishing away for dear life.

"Yes, it is close in this vicinity," Lawton remarked, scanning the houses. "It has been about a year since I was here, but I am pretty sure that it is in one of these houses."

"Private house?" Wrinkles queried, rubbing away without looking up.

"Well, yes," Lawton replied, hesitatingly. "I presume I'll have no difficulty in finding it, if I make a few inquiries."

"What's ther name?"

"Peg—Priscilla Peg. She is an elderly maiden lady."

"Don't know her. Don't know none but blushin' young damsels who gits stuck on my style and buy me candy."

A momentary silence followed; then, sure enough, a second-story window was raised, and a feminine voice called out:

"Was the gentleman in search of the residence of Miss Peg?" was the query propounded.

"I am, madam," Lawton responded, looking up, and at the same time doffing his hat. "Can you direct me to her residence?"

"Wait," was the brief answer, and the window was shut down.

"Thank fortune I have found the place!" Lawton said, in a loud tone. "And now, my boy, can I get you to deliver this package for me?"

"Where to, mister?"

"Leave it at the Bingham House, and tell the clerk it is for Mr. Brackett."

"All right, boss. Cost ye half a dollar."

"Very good. Here's the money."

The door of the house opened just then, and a servant in livery appeared.

"Step inside, sah!" he said, with an obsequious bow.

Lawton paid Wrinkles; then, mounting the steps, he entered the gaming "brace," and the door was closed.

"That settles that!" Wrinkles mused, as he arose, shouldered the bundle, and trudged away. "The engine hes got up steam, an' the masheen is beginnin' ter move. Thet aire place aire on the 'queer,' an' Lawty's in fer the next quadrille. Gollys be-gosh! I wish it was me!"

CHAPTER VI.

AT ROSAMOND'S.

LOU LAWTON followed the liveried servant into the spacious hall of the house, which, supposedly, was a haven for aristocratic gamblers.

From the elegant hall he was ushered into a magnificently furnished parlor, where the light was quite dim.

As he entered, a magnificently-formed and richly attired young lady, of rare personal beauty, advanced toward him, with outstretched jeweled hands.

"Why, Mr. Brackett, this is a most unexpected pleasure, to see you here!" she said, with gushing cordiality. "I presume you remember—"

"Miss Rosamond?" Lawton ventured, putting out his hand.

"The same. I see you have not forgotten me, although I am sure I don't exactly recall your face. The name comes to me, however, and—I am delighted to see you. Be seated, pray. Will you have a glass of wine?"

"No, thanks; I have become a total abstainer since my previous visit. It was owing to a trifle too much champy, no doubt, that I lost so much then."

"You did lose heavily then?"

"Oh! yes—that is for me, as I am not as rich as I'd like to be."

"Pooh! for riches! They are but a mockery, at best. Did you wish to try your luck to-night, Mr. Brackett?"

"Well, yes; I had a notion that way. I have a few dollars I can spare—that is, of course, if there is a moderate limit."

"Certainly. Ten is the limit to-night. Come up-stairs, please. We have quite a jolly little party."

Lawton accompanied her, his confidence somewhat reassured.

Although he had never played to gamble, he was pretty well versed in games of cards, and flattered himself that few could beat him.

They ascended the winding staircase to the next floor, and entered what Lawton calculated was a front room. But on entering he saw that he was in one long apartment, which occupied all of the second floor, except what was taken up by the hall.

The room was richly carpeted, and its furniture, of ebony, was of late design. The pictures upon the wall, in particular, were masterpieces of art.

At the further end of the room, which was lit by two crystal chandeliers, was a bar containing liquors and glasses, and presided over by a spruce young negro.

The only other furniture consisted of a couple of tables, a dozen chairs, a sofa, and a magnificent pier glass.

At one of the tables, beneath the effulgent light of the chandelier, three men were seated, engaged in a game of cards.

One of the trio was Trimbal Thackera, attired with scrupulous neatness, and looking considerably flushed and excited.

At his right sat a well-dressed, full-bearded gentleman, who appeared to be one of the class whose daily business pursuits were of a more elevating character than gambling.

The third party, certainly, looked out of place in those brilliant surroundings, and Lawton at once concluded that he must be the

"goose" Wrinkles had referred to, and the process of plucking was now in operation.

He was a large, broad-shouldered, fleshy man, considerably past the middle age, and was plainly a farmer, as his garb was mainly of homespun, his hat had seen years of service, for Sunday best, and he wore the general air of one not accustomed to city ways.

In face, he reminded Lawton of one now passed away—the late Horace Greeley. His face was full and inclined to be florid; he had the Greeley bald spot, the Greeley fringe of white whiskers, and wore his glasses as only the great politician could wear them.

Seen together, the two might readily have been taken for brothers.

"Gentlemen!" the fair Rosamond said, advancing, her arm locked in Lawton's—"gentlemen, this is Mr. Brackett, of Chicago, who was formerly one of our patrons. Mr. Brackett, this is Mr. Sherry, Mr. Nobles and Mr. Wiggins. Gentlemen, I presume you have room for one more at the table?"

"Certainly!" Trimbal Thackera, alias Mr. Sherry assented, with an inquiring glance at Rosamond and her new guest. "We are glad to know you and welcome you to our midst."

Not without some feelings of nervousness, Lawton seated himself at the table, and soon had an opportunity of dipping into a game that was just starting.

Mr. Wiggins had lost the other to Mr. Nobles. The game was poker, ten dollars limit, and Lawton invested an X in chips without ado.

"Gosh all fish-hooks! It looks as if you intended to win," old Wiggins declared, wiping a tear from the end of his nose. "Hyer I've bin losin' an' losin' till I'm out about two hundred dollars. Then, there's them two car-load o' calves up at the stock-yard, an' not a one on 'em sold. Jest my consarned luck. I'm allus gittin' mixed up in suthin' I hadn't ort to. I say, thar, miss; ye hain't see'd anythin' o' my gal yet?"

"Not yet," Rosamond responded. "I doubt if she gets home from the ball until near morning."

"Well, then, I reckon I might as well play keards till she comes. Yer know, sir," turning to Lawton, "taint often old Bill Wiggins gits ter town, or out wi' ther boys; but I hed two car-load o' fat yearlin's, and so I fetched 'em to Philadelphia—cl'ar from Herkimer county, York State. They're the slashin'est steers you ever see'd. An' then, ye see, I kill two birds wi' one stun. I've bin hankerin' fer a year past ter see my niece, who's heer in Philadelphia, an' take'r hum wi' us. Ye see, me an' the old woman aire gittin' long in years, an' Winifred she'd be a power o' company fer us. An' the funniest thing, when I got in the city I met the young lady yonder, an' et struck me she might know somethin' 'bout where Winifred hung out—so I up an' axed her. An' would you believe et, she told me my niece boarded right to her house, an' so come along wi' her. 'Spect the gal's growed up powerful big an' pert, miss?"—this to Rosamond.

"She is a very pretty and amiable girl," was the brief reply.

Lawton had listened without failing to watch his game. The stake was two dollars a corner, and Nobles and Wiggins dropped out, after contributing six chips each to the pot.

It was Lawton's "say," and he put down one chip.

"Is that all?" Sherry said, with a smile, and he went one better. "Are you done?"

"No!" and Lawton put down all but one chip.

Sherry put all his stack on the table.

"What you got?"

"Four Jacks!" and Lawton displayed the cards.

The stock-broker uttered an oath.

"The pot's yours!" he growled.

"Gud boy!" chuckled Wiggins, gleefully.

"Yeow kin beat 'em ef I can't. That's proper. Here's my pocketbook—I want yer ter keep it for me while I take a leetle nap. Ef ye git short don't be afeard ter borry what ye want out o' et, fer there's plenty more when I sell the steers."

And arising from the table, the farmer shuffled over to the sofa, and stretched himself out upon it.

"Drugged!" Lawton reflected, "and I'm in for it, now, I'll bet!"

"Queer old duffer that!" Sherry, or Thackera growled, "to leave his money in a stranger's hands."

"It will be safe!" Lawton observed. "Will you play more?"

"Certainly. What you say to playing for fifty dollars a corner?"

"I'm agreeable."

"Then all right—we'll make it fifty, with a hundred limit!"

"And I'll join in making it four-handed!" Rosamond said.

Lawton had seen that old Wiggins's pocket-book was fat with money, and he resolved to stay in the game as long as he had any show.

Something seemed to tell him that it was his lucky night!

And so far as cards were concerned it proved that way.

Five games did he win in rapid succession.

CHAPTER VII.

FARMER THACKERA'S STORY.

IT WAS at the conclusion of the fifth game that Trimbal Thackera uttered a savage oath, and moved back from the table.

"There's no use of wasting money on you!" he growled, "for the devil's luck is with you."

"Oh! I don't know!" Lawton replied, coolly, as he raked in the stakes, and pocketed them, exchanging what chips he had for cash. "It's the way cards go—sometimes for me, sometimes for another. Are you all done?"

An affirmative nod was the answer.

"Very well; then I guess I will be going, as I am rather fatigued," Lawton said, rising.

Trimbal Thackera and Nobles also arose.

"You will of course leave old Wiggins's pocket-book in our charge?" the broker said, in a matter-of-fact way.

"I of course will do nothing of the sort," Lawton replied, calmly, and yet with assuring firmness. "I'll deliver the wallet to the one I received it from. I am responsible for it, sir!"

"Do not disturb the old gentleman, Mr. Brackett!" Rosamond spoke up. "He is resting nicely, and I will give him the wallet, when he awakens."

"You will have to excuse me," Lawton replied, "but I prefer to deliver it, myself, and then all responsibility is off my hands."

Without further words, he advanced to the sofa, and shook the farmer, roughly.

"Come, Wiggins, wake up!" he cried. "I'm going to leave you now!"

But, Wiggins, did not awaken, or give any show of doing so, although Lawton shook him thoroughly, and called to him, several times.

"Let him alone! You can't awaken him!" Trimbal Thackera growled.

"So I see!" Lawton retorted. "The man has been drugged!"

"Drugged?" cried Rosamond, quickly, and angrily. "How dare you malign the repu—"

"Stop!" Lawton replied, coolly, commandingly. "I did not say the man was drugged here, madam. Drugged he is, nevertheless, and not likely to awaken, soon. Consequently, I shall retain possession of his money, and you may direct him to call for it at the Bingham House."

"Oh! no! That little game won't work!" Thackera declared, grimly. "You cannot take his money away from here. You must surrender it to us!"

"I do not recognize such a word as *must*, sir!" Lawton replied. "The money is safe in my care, as yours, and I will not surrender it!"

"But, you will!" Rosamond cried, fiercely, and a pistol appeared in her grasp. "You give up the money, or go out of here, crippled!"

"Indeed! Then, you had as lief have enemies as not, eh?"

"Pooh! for them! They can prove nothing; and, then, too, I move from here, next week. So you see we've got you anyway you want to have it, Mr. Brackett. Gentlemen, move upon him, and secure Mr. Wiggins's property. If he offers resistance, I'll ring for the police."

"You'd better be sensible now!" Thackera said, advancing. "You'll only get yourself into trouble if you don't."

"And, if I mistake not, Trimbal Thackera, you'll get *yourself* into trouble," Lawton said, as he took the wallet from his pocket, and tossed it upon the table. "Now, madam," turning to Rosamond, "will you have the kindness to show me out of this place?"

"Certainly, sir."

And she led the way down stairs, and in a moment more, had bowed Lawton from the front door.

She then returned to the gaming-room, her face betraying considerable anxiety.

"This is a bad deal!" she said, soberly. "Do you think that man will make us trouble?"

"Curse him—like enough so!" Thackera gritted. "I thought you said he came from Chicago?"

Rosamond explained.

"He's nothing but a spy, and I think I know

who sent him!" Thackera growled. "He knew me, at any rate, and that makes matters bad. I must get out of here without delay."

"And I, too," Nobles declared, anxiously.

"But what are you going to do with old Wiggins?" Rosamond cried quickly. "He must not be left here on my hands!"

"Oh! that's easy enough. Have your servants lug him up the alley to Thirteenth street, and drop him. When he wakes up he won't be able to give an account of himself."

"The idea is good. But the pocketbook?"

"I'll take charge of that for now, and hold it until we see how matters turn out. If no terrible time is made I'll divide up at our next meeting."

Thackera and Nobles then took their departure by the front way, and were highly elated when they perceived that, so far as appearances were concerned, the coast was clear.

This was because they did not see either Wrinkles, Lawton, or a policeman.

Within the dark shadows of an alley across the street, however, the first two named were lurking and on the watch, and saw the two men leave the house.

"I'm blamed if I know hardly what to do," Lawton said. "There's no telling what will happen to old Wiggins, if he remains in that place."

Wrinkles reflected a moment.

"'Twon't do much good to pull the place," he said. "You bet his royal slithers, Thackera, has collared on to that pocketbook. An' Wiggins won't remain long over there neither."

"Why?"

"Humph! The goose aire picked, an' ain't o' so much account. He'll git chucked inter the street, to be gobbled up by a policeman."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Waal, keep a peeled eye, I reckon. I've been explorin', an' there's an alley that runs from the back o' Rosamond's house, through ter Thirteenth. So, if old Wig is chucked, it'll be up there. I move we mosey in that direction, an' if I find the old man, I'll git a hack an' we'll load him in."

"What then? Where in the world will you take him to?"

"To the Reese House, till he wakes up. It's a good place, an' I can fix things up for the two of you. Frank aire a good feller. I shines him up 'casionally, for nothin', an' he thinks I'm just old peaches, wi' Chester county cream."

When they arrived at the Thirteenth street entrance to the alley, sure enough they found old Wiggins lying upon his back, a few yards up the alley.

"You watch him. I'll soon fetch a kerridge," and Wrinkles darted away.

It was but a short drive to the Reese House, and when they got there, Wrinkles entered, to interview the landlord.

He soon came out, announcing that it was all right, and was accompanied by a porter, who assisted to carry the farmer into the hotel.

He was conveyed to a comfortable apartment, and Lawton and Wrinkles set to work, trying to restore him to consciousness.

It was not an easy job, for the drug that had been administered to him plainly must have been a powerful one.

"It would be rather a dark job if he should die on our hands," Lawton said, anxiously, as they worked away.

"Pooh! He won't kick the bucket," Wrinkles asserted confidently. "He's got too much backbone for that, you bet!"

After an hour's time, they succeeded in arousing old Wiggins from his stupor, and he seemingly awoke to a full sense of what had happened.

"I've bin drugged—an' robbed!" was his first exclamation, as he sat up, and gazed at our two friends.

"You are pretty near right," Lawton said. "You have been drugged. Where were you, the last you can recollect?"

"Oh! I know. I was in a gambling-den, inter which I was enticed. I felt the spell comin' on, an' I give me pocketbook to you, an' went an' laid down."

"Are you sure you gave it to me, sir?"

"Dead sure. I remember your face. But, you ain't got it, now."

"How do you know?"

"'Cause I know," was the grim reply. "Although I was powerless to open my mouth or eyes, or move a limb, my hearing was as keen as ever and I know'd what was goin' on. That's how I know you ain't got that pocketbook."

"It lifts a great load from my mind, for you know the circumstances that caused me to leave it behind. Was there much money in it?"

"About three hundred. But I'll git it back. Thackera's got it."

"Ah! I presumed he would take it. Did you ever see him before?"

"Yes."

Lawton was silent a moment; then he said:

"You'll excuse me, Mr. Wiggins, but, somehow you're a sort of enigma to me."

The farmer laughed.

"Am I?" he chuckled. "Well, I s'pose you are anxious to hear more about me."

"Well, yes."

"I suppose likely. An' since ye hev took care of me, I'll tell ye. That story I told at the poker room can be told diff'rent. In the first place, my name ain't Wiggins."

"It isn't?"

"Not a bit of it. I came from Herkimer county, New York, fetched two car-load o' steers down here, an' all that sort o' thing, but my name ain't Wiggins—it's Thackera!"

"Thackera!" both Wrinkles and Lawton echoed in surprise.

"Kerect—Thackera; old Thede Thackera. The feller who called hisself Sherry—that, sir, is my son!"

"Your son!"

"You bet. He's a precious rascal, Trim is, an' I see he ain't no better nor he uster be."

"This is surprising news to us!" Lawton said.

"Did your son not recognize you?"

"Guess not, or you'd never ketched him playin' cards with his old dad."

"How did you come to get into that den?"

"Somewhat as I told ye. I arriv' in Philadelphia a perfect stranger, an' I axed the young woman, Rosamond, whom I met at the depot, if she could direct me to No. — Coates street—that's where Trim lives. She said, to be sure she could—that she boarded at the identical place. So I went with her. She tuk me ter where I met you, treated me in big style with cake an' wine, an' said my niece wouldn't be home till night. I was playin' Wiggins, an' I knowed there was suthin' crooked 'bout her, an' finally come to the conclusion I wasn't in Trim's house at all. I'm the darn'dest old cuss ye ever see'd, anyhow—don't keer fer a few hundred, when I'm out on a bender, as long as the geese cackle. An' findin' I'd put my fut in it, I made up my mind to see the thing thr'u, ef I got strapped. Et kinder knocked me when Trim come in, but I see'd he didn't 'pear to know me, an' so I didn't keer. I wasn't long sizin' 'em up fer a gang o' sharps, but when you came in, sez I, 'There's an honest feller, I'll bet a cheese; I kinder instinctively smelt honesty in yer clothes. An' that's why I give ye my pocket-book.'"

"The compliment is appreciated," Lawton said, smiling. "It was through my young detective friend here, Wrinkles, that I entered there to see and hear what I could, as Wrinkles had previously got wind that a 'goose was to be plucked.' So you were really in search of a niece, eh?"

"A granddaughter, rather. But I'll tell you ther story, fer it'll make matters plainer to ye. I'm a farmer—own a dozen farms, too—and hev lived on the old homestead ever since I was married. We never hed but one child, an' we named him Trimbal. He grow'd up pert enough, but turned out to be a bad egg—a lazy, reckless, good-fer-nothing cuss—an' I often prophesied he'd come to the gallows. The way he treated us was scand'lous."

"Well, when Trim grow'd up, he got married to a nice gal, an' I settled him on one o' my farms hopin' he'd do better; but he didn't. It wasn't more'n a couple year when he got into an ugly scrape an' had to clear out, which he did, leavin' his wife an' child behind. The officers searched high an' low fer him, but never found him. Soon after, his wife died, pretty much thr'u' grief, and I was made the sole an' legal guardian of my grandchild—a purty leetle girl. Years passed on wi'out no tidings o' Trim, an' the gal got to be six year. Then her gran'-father, on her mother's side, died, and left her ten thousan' in clean money, which was to be put out on interest fer her till she was of age. Bein' able tew give bonds, I got hold o' the money, socked it inter bonds, an' she's got a big fortin' now."

Wrinkles and Lawton exchanged glances, but did not speak.

The farmer went on:

"Twa'n't long after this when the child cum up missin', an' a note left behind told me that her father had kidnapped her and was going to take her with him. I set detectives to work in private—the public was given to understand that little Theo had simply gone to live wi' her father. I've kept detectives at work ever since,

an' et was only a short time ago that I found out that Trim and Theo were living here in Philadelphia."

"So they are," Lawton said; "and the strange coincidence of our meeting is, that I am personally acquainted with your granddaughter."

"Ye don't say! Glad to hear it. Yer name is: let me see—"

"Lawton, sir—Louis Lawton. The name Brackett is fictitious. I am but a poor, honest laboring man—in fact, I drive an ash-cart for the city. Yet, I am proud to say, I know Miss Thackera."

"Oh, you great, blundering gunky!" thought Wrinkles, who had kept wonderfully mum. "You've gone an' put yer fut in it, fer sure! I'd jest like ter have the privelege o' bootin' yer from heer clean to Manyunk!"

"It don't make a 'tarnal bit o' diff'rence how 'umble a feller's callin' is as long's he's square, honorable an' respectable!" old Thackera said, with emphasis. "I uster drive as teamster, years ago, but wasn't ashamed o' it. I'm right glad ye know the gal. Bin sparkin' her, I expect?"

Lawton colored.

"Well, yes; I have been paying her my addresses occasionally," he acknowledged. "Yesterday, however, Mr. Thackera forbid my seeing her any more, and I understand he has her locked in her room."

"Thunderation! Ye don't tell me! Got her shet up, eh? Oh! that's like him. He's mean enough ter steal a played-out boss's dyin' breath, Trim is. But don't let et sweat ye any 'bout the gal, boyee. Trim's old dad is purty near as smart as he uster be, an' ef you wanten spark the gal, ye can do it. I'm boss over her. An' I kinder like you too. But fer you two fellers, I reckon I'd be layin' in a gutter, or else in a station-house."

"Do you intend to claim your granddaughter, sir?"

"On course I do, fer sart'in!"

"But supposing your son refuses to give her up?"

"He refuse? Why, darn it all, he dassn't! I've got the pinchers on him, an' he dassn't go ag'in' me. What time is it?"

"Past midnight."

"Well, I guess I'll take a nap till mornin', an' then us three will discuss bizness."

"Very well. We have detain'd you too long already. You will find us down-stairs in the morning, ready and willing to assist you, sir."

And then Wrinkles and Lawton departed.

CHAPTER VIII.

BARGAINING FOR A BRIDE.

THE following morning saw Trimbal Thackera once more seated at the writing table in his broker's office, looking haggard, hollow-eyed, and as if he had passed a restless night.

Upon the table in front of him was a telegraph instrument, to whose rapid ticking he gave his attention. From the instrument a wire ran upward, across the ceiling, and out of doors, where it was lost among a network of other wires.

The broker's face was a study. It's expression was of eagerness, combined with dread and doubt—an expression that did not brighten as the instrument ticked on.

At length, however, the instrument stopped, and as it did so, Trimbal Thackera leaned back in his chair, with whitened face, and glaring eyes.

"My God! I am ruined!" he cried, aloud, and in tones of bitter anguish—"ruined! ruined!"

"Ruined!" echoed a man, who had entered just in time to hear the words—a tall, stylish, handsome fellow, with a blonde mustache.

"Why, how is that, Mr. Thackera?"

The broker looked up with a scowl, which, however, vanished instantly.

"Ah! is that you, Percival!" he said, cordially. "Be seated, pray. You come in time to find me in a deuced unpleasant fix this mornin'!"

"So I should infer by your exclamation as I entered," was the reply, as the young man drew a chair near the table. "What appears to be the difficulty?"

"Difficulty! Why, sir, I am ruined—totally and irretrievably ruined."

"Indeed! That is bad news, sir. Pray, explain. I always supposed you quite wealthy, sir!"

"I have been; but, unfortunately, my wealth has always been kept in ready cash, with which I speculated. I have been unusually successful until now, when I suddenly find myself bereft

of my wings. You see, C., B. & Q. stock has been selling very low lately, and many brokers have been discharging whole blocks of it. Foreseeing a rise, I have been quietly buying it in—that is, such was my supposition. I authorized my Chicago correspondents, Flynn & Co., to buy in all the C., B. & Q. they could, and have advanced them, from day to day, until a week ago I exhausted my finances, and to make up a required demand, used money intrusted to me, and raised money on my paper. All this, and previous advances, is gone to the devil. A telegram, just received, announces that Flynn dropped dead yesterday, and that his partner has fled into Canada, with all the firm's resources, which must have been large, as investigation proves that the firm has lately received large sums of money, while no proof can be found of its having been invested. So you see, Percival, all my money's gone, and I am ruined."

"It is bad, sure enough!" Percival said, gravely. "Places you in a bad fix, with your local creditors?"

"Of course. Unless something is done, and that right quick, I'll be posted up as a 'goner.' I must have money to meet my obligations, as promptly as they may be tendered, or I can never recover from this blow—will be announced in Bradstreet's as having failed. By Heaven! I'm nearly crazy."

"Be calm, sir. Nothing is gained by worrying, in matters like this. Have you no hopes of recovering at least a portion of what you have lost?"

"None whatever. Canada is a haven for defaulters, and were I to follow Flynn's partner up, he could snap his fingers at me, and laugh in my face."

"Perhaps. Do you anticipate that your creditors will make a run on you?"

"Nothing is more probable. It is known on 'Change that I had large dealings with Flynn & Co., and you know it don't take long for news to spread in the money market."

"True. How much do you owe your creditors, sir?"

"Twenty thousand would square everything, and leave me penniless."

Young Percival lit a cigar, and glanced at his watch.

"Mr. Thackera!" he said, "you will remember that, some months ago, I paid my addresses to your daughter, and that I suddenly ceased to call upon her?"

"I do. It was a great surprise to us both!"

"Without doubt. And I have called now to tender you an explanation, sir. Several years ago, and prior to my acquaintance with Miss Theo, I was entrapped into a marriage with an adventuress, who, however, left me, and I heard she was dead. It was while paying my attention to your daughter that I learned she was not dead, and, accordingly, like an honorable man, I ceased my visits to your house. A week ago, the woman died, in one of the hospitals, here, and I am now free, and called, to-day, to sound you in regard to my prospects of getting back into Theo's graces. You see, I am about to take a trip to Europe, and on my return, seriously contemplate marrying and settling down."

"Your reception will be most cordial, without a doubt," Thackera declared, eagerly. "Theo hasn't acted like the same girl since your visits ceased, and has refused to go into society. I bespeak for you, a warm welcome."

"This is good news, indeed. And, now Thackera, since you're in such hard luck, I'll tell you what I'll do. Promise me to coach up the matter in such a shape that Theo marries me, before I start for Europe, next week Friday, and I'll draw you up a check for five thousand more than enough to satisfy your creditors, and place it in your hands as a loan."

"It's a bargain! Percival, you are a royal fellow, and I shall have no trouble in arranging matters, as far as Theo is concerned; so you can consider it settled that she will be your bride, on demand."

Without ado, Percival drew his check-book from his pocket, and wrote out the check for the large amount, with as little apparent concern as though it were for but a paltry sum.

He was the junior partner of the firm to whom Trimbal Thackera had recommended Wrinkles, and aside from this, was rich, in his own right, from the fact of having inherited a large fortune.

"There!" he said, tossing the check upon the table, "you will have no trouble in getting the money upon it. You may broach the subject to your daughter, at noon, and I will call around to see what the prospects are."

"Oh! they'll be bright, I assure you!" the

broker said, with his blandest smile, as he followed Percival to the door. "You will be perfectly safe in making all necessary preparations, as everything will be arranged to your wish."

"I trust so," Percival replied, briefly, and then departed.

When he was gone, Trimbal Thackera returned to his seat at the table, his face expressing great satisfaction.

"Ha! ha! luck has not all deserted me, yet!" he chuckled. "I've got Percival on the string, and I'll work him well. Theo must marry him! There's no ifs nor ands about that. She must marry him, and I don't think I shall have much trouble in gaining her consent. As the police have failed to capture the fellow, Lawton, it is probable he has fled from the city, unless—"

Here something occurred to the broker.

"By Heaven!" he ejaculated, a moment later, "I believe the fellow who was at the room, last night was Lawton! If so, he has got me about as much in his power, as I have got him in mine. And the pocketbook of old Wiggins! I've been so busy that I've forgotten to examine it."

He drew the wallet from his pocket, and leisurely examined its contents. As he did so he made a, to him, startling discovery.

He found several business letters addressed to "Theodore Thackera" at the farmer's home post-office; also, the same name was printed inside the wallet, in red ink.

A fearful oath escaped the broker; the wallet dropped into his lap, and he leaned back in his chair, with a pale, affrighted face.

"Theodore Thackera!" he gasped, huskily. "That is the old man's name, and that, then, was he, last night. Great Heaven! I wonder if he recognized me? Probably not, or there would have been a row, on the spot. Curse my infernal luck. I need not ask what brings him here. He has come for Theo. He has found me out, and may even now have spies upon my movements."

The discovery seemed to have an unnerving effect upon him, for he trembled in spite of himself and there was a wild, hunted look in his eyes.

"Yes, there can be no doubt but what it is the old man, and his coming means trouble for me. He hasn't a spark of pity or mercy for me, and—I'll be a consummate idiot, if I have any for him. We are enemies, to the death. I wonder what became of him, last night?"

He reflected, grimly, for some time.

"I've a notion there's more deep water, here, than I at first supposed. Lawton, Wrinkles, and the old man may all be working in concert, against me. But, curse 'em, I defy 'em! and, more than that, I will baffle them! The old man shall not have the girl! She must marry Percival, and that, too, at once—this very night. Once she is married, the old man's power over her, is virtually at an end. I may by sharp work, be able to get her started off for Europe, before there is any serious row!"

With white and resolute face, he put on his coat and hat, and left the office.

First of all, he went to a neighboring bank, and drew the money on Percival's check, and stored it away about his person.

"If things work right, and I don't have any trouble with the old man, I'll pay my creditors what I owe them. Otherwise, I'll reserve this snug little sum, for future emergencies!" he muttered.

From the bank, he made his way to his own residence, to which he gained admittance by a latch-key.

"Theo must yield!" he hissed, or "she shall have cause to repent her stubbornness, all the days of her life!"

CHAPTER IX.

TACKLING A TRADE.

WRINKLES and Lou Lawton were about the office of the Reese House in the morning, when old Theodore Thackera came down-stairs, looking considerably the better for his rest, short though it had been.

"Good-mornin', boys! How d'ye do?" he saluted pleasantly. "I see ye didn't go back on the old man, after all."

"Certainly not. You can depend upon us, at all times," Lawton said. "How are you feeling this morning?"

"Spry as a young hoss turned out to pasture, sir. We'll hev a smile, together, and then we will talk business."

"You will have to excuse us—we do not indulge!" Lawton replied, respectfully.

"Lookes heer! who told you to chip in fer me?" cried Wrinkles. "I ain't temp'rin'—I drink soda water, whenever I kin git it."

"That's right, boy! Allus speak out yer mind."

Accordingly, the farmer and Wrinkles partook of their respective favorite beverages, and then the trio became seated in the office for a consultation.

"I took it from what you said last night, that you desired the assistance of my young friend and myself," Lawton remarked, after they had conversed a few minutes. "If so, we are at your service."

"Of course I want ye," the farmer declared. "I am fair-ter-middling 'cute, but bein' a stranger, heer, I'd as like as not get tuck in an' done fer, more'n once. I kinder want you fellers to help me find the gal, an' I'll pay ye well fer it."

"D'yer purpose ter make a open demand fer her?" Wrinkles asked.

"No. That wouldn't do. It would give Trim a chance ter try an' git rid o' the girl, an' outwit his old dad. It's likely he's found out, by my pocketbook, who I am, an' he won't be idle. We must contrive somehow to get the girl in our possession."

"That won't be no small job!" Wrinkles declared. "Old Trimble will be as fly as a Jersey muskeeter, an' I'll bet ten cents to a terrapin thet the gal can't be got at, 'less I get my fingerin' masheen ter workin' right. I'm sum on connivin', ef I do say et, an' ther boys allow I orter be 'pinted ter inspect ther crooks an' quirly-ques of the Gover'ment."

"Then, set your machine in motion," Lawton said, with a smile. "If I can get an interview with Theo, I have no doubt but she will willingly leave her father's house, as we are already about as good as engaged."

"Well, I'll let you two young heads figger on it!" the farmer assented. "In the mean time, while you're formin' your plans, I'll go an' sell my steers, an' come back. Then we'll git down to bizness. Ef ye hit on any plan during my absence, go right ahead with it, an' I'll be waitin' fer ye heer, when you come back."

It was so arranged.

And Mr. Thackera set out for the stock-yards in West Philadelphia, to dispose of his steers.

Wrinkles and Lawton then held a consultation, but failed to decide upon any definite plan of action.

"One thing's sure—we've got to have a change of appearance!" the gamin said—"you as well as I. It won't do for us to be skylarkin' around, as we look now; fer Trimble may put a spy onter our movements. We'll take another trip to South street."

They did so, to the emporium where Lawton got his first disguise. In an hour they were on the street again, their appearance greatly altered.

Lawton was dressed as a mechanic, and wore a straggling full beard, while Wrinkles's appearance was so changed, by a clean face, new outfit of clothing, and dandy little blonde mustache, that even his most intimate associates would never have suspected his identity.

"My! but ain't I a dude!" he chuckled. "Ef I mash a millionairess afore we get thr'u' wi' this job, don't kick."

"I won't; only don't you try to cut me out," Lawton replied. "What are you going to do now?"

"Dunno. Hain't no hefty ideas struck me yet. We'll go around and drop in on Newbold, an' mebbe I'll think o' some plan in the mean time."

"Who is Newbold?"

"Oh! he's the feller I lives wi', over in Ram Cat Alley, when I lives wi' any one. 'Spect he'll skeercely know me."

"Is it safe?"

"Oh, you bet! Newbold is solid. He's a plumber, an' does work fer lots of the aristoc, ye know."

They arrived at the plumber's shop, in due time, and found a middle-aged man, hard at work, fitting up some gas-pipe.

"Hello! Newbold!" Wrinkles saluted. "Guess ye don't know a feller."

The plumber eyed the gamin, in astonishment, having recognized him by his voice.

"Waal, I'll be blowed!" he ejaculated. "What in thunder's come over you, boy?"

"A new suit of togs, to be sure. Got a new job, an' had to spruce up. This is a friend of mine—Pete Pancoast. How's bizness?"

"Good—too good. I'm overrun with work, an' to make matters worse, I've got two big jobs on hand, an' my hired man's left. I'm busy here, an' there's an outside job that must be attended to. Wish you'd get on your old togs, an' do the job for me. It isn't hard."

"What is it?"

"Why, there's a new set of gas-burners to go

into a house. The old ones to be taken off, an' the new ones put on, you know."

"Whereabouts?"

"Why, it's up on Coates street—Thackera's house," and here the plumber bent closer over his work, and did not notice the expressions of surprise and eagerness on the faces of his two visitors. "Orter been 'tended to before, but I've been too confoundedly busy."

Wrinkles nodded to Lawton, and then lit a cigar, to gain time to compose himself.

"I guess we can help you out of it, Newbold," he said. "My friend here is idle, and will be glad of the job, and I'll go along and oversee it. How's that fill your eye?"

"First-class. It will be a great accommodation to me. Are you ready to go to work now, sir?"

"Any time that suits you," Lawton replied.

"All right. I'll fix you out. Here's a box, with all the tools you'll need, and here's the package of burners. Wrinkles, you can carry this light step-ladder. And, now, you can be off as soon as you like!"

"All right. We'll do the job up brown!" Wrinkles assured. "My pard has did a turn at this kind o' work before."

They left the shop to enter into their hazardous experiment. If their disguise remained unpenetrated they might succeed in their errand, and get an interview with Theo. If to the contrary, the results would hardly be as pleasant.

"I'm not sure but what we've undertaken a risky proceeding!" Lawton said, as they neared their destination. "Perhaps we won't get a glimpse of Theo."

"I'll bet we will!" Wrinkles declared. "Trimbal he's down at the office 'bout this time, an' 'long's we're plumbers, the servants won't be so 'tic'ler. We'll commence in the parlor, eh?"

"Nary. That'll give 'em more chance to scoot the girl. We goes in the third story, and works down."

At length they reached the Thackera residence. Everything wore a quiet appearance on the outside.

After an exchange of glances our two detectives mounted the steps, and Lawton pulled the bell.

The summons was answered by the same spruce darky lad who had previously waited upon Wrinkles.

"Does Mr. Thackera live here?" Lawton asked.

"Yas, sah. Be you de plumbers what's to fix de gas jets?"

"We are."

"Den walk in, sah. De boss 's been frettin', 'ca'se you didn't come before."

And so, equipped with the tools of their whilom trade, Wrinkles and Lawton entered, literally, the lion's den, in quest of the lamb.

CHAPTER X.

THE JOB OF PLUMBING.

"WONDER if we're puttin' our fut inter the pie?" Wrinkles reflected, as they entered. "If we're found out we're likely ter get to Cherry Hill a-hummin'. No fear o' my givin' anything away, ef Lawton keeps his mug shut."

"We will begin work in the third story, and work down, if it don't make any difference to you!" Lawton said, addressing the negro.

"All right, sah! Come dis way, an' I'll show you all de rooms first."

He took them to the third story, and unlocked the various apartments, and then down to the second story.

"When you gits to dis room," the darky said, indicating a front apartment, "you unlock de door wid dis key, an' go in, an' den lock de door after you. Dar's a young leddy in dar whose mind ain't exactly lebbel, you know, an' we has to keep her locked up."

"Not dangerous, is she?"

"Oh! no, sah!"

"All right! We will take the precaution you have named. Come, Jimmy; we'll do the third story first."

They took their tools to the third story, accordingly, and set to work.

The negro, to their chagrin, dogged them from room to room, and watched them work.

"Durn him! I've a notion to bounce him down the stairs!" Wrinkles muttered under his breath.

At last, however, at the tinkle of a bell, the colored young gent hastened down the stairs, much to the two detectives' relief.

They hastily finished their work in the third story, and then moved down to the second.

"We will try Theo's room first!" Lawton said, first rapping and then unlocking the door.

As they entered the apartment, which was large and handsomely furnished, they beheld a

young woman seated near the window—a beautiful young creature, with starry eyes and golden hair, and a face of marvelous sweetness, while in form she was graceful and sylph-like, and attired in a tasteful morning robe, with a bunch of hot-house flowers at her throat.

She partly arose as the two detectives entered. "Pray, do not be alarmed!" Lawton hastened to say as he locked the door. "We wish to fix the chandelier."

She resumed her seat, and once more looked out of the window with a sigh.

"Wrinkles, I'll leave you to attend to the gas fixings," Lawton announced.

He then advanced toward the object of his adoration.

"Sh! not a word aloud! Theo, do you not know me?" he asked.

She turned, and gave him a quick, startled glance.

"Sir! I—I—"

Then she uttered a low, glad cry, as Lawton, for a moment, partly removed his disguise.

"Oh! Lou! Lou! Is it really you? Oh! I am so glad you have come! Papa to'd me you had fled from the city to avoid arrest, but I didn't believe it."

"And I suppose he told you I stole his pocketbook, too!"

"Yes, he did, but I didn't believe a word of it."

"You were right for not doing so. Although I am charged with the theft, I am as guiltless as you are. However, I did knock your father down, because he insulted me, and if I were arrested, I'd no doubt get sent up. Therefore, you now see me masquerading in this disguise. It was through my young detective friend, here, that I learned you were under lock and key."

"Yes, papa is very stern and cruel. We had a quarrel about you. Because he couldn't set me against you, Lou, and because I wouldn't promise never to recognize you again, he has kept me locked up."

Explanations rapidly followed, and Theodore Thackera's object in coming to Philadelphia, and full particulars, were made known to Theo.

"Oh! I should so like to go away, with my grandpa!" the girl said. "Papa does not seem like a papa to me, and often curses and abuses me. Oh! yes, if I can get out of here, I'll go with him, willingly."

"We will arrange it, somehow. Wrinkles, you are to secrete yourself here, in this room, and watch your chance to get Miss Theo clear of the house. If any questions are asked, about you, I'll tell 'em I sent you back to the shop."

Just then, a door was heard to open and shut, down-stairs, and some one was heard ascending the steps, who wore creaky shoes.

Theo turned as pale as death.

"It's papa!" she gasped.

"Quick! hide, Wrinkles!" Lawton ordered.

In an instant, a transformation had taken place.

Wrinkles was crowded into a wardrobe, among a lot of female attire; Lawton was mounted upon the step-ladder, working industriously away at the chandelier, and looking every inch a mechanic; Theo was sitting at the window, apparently very much interested in a book she pretended to be reading.

A minute later, a key was inserted in the lock of the hall door, and the door opened, admitting Trimbal Thackera.

He looked considerably surprised, at what he saw, and sharply scrutinized Theo; but no expression of her fair face betrayed excitement, or that she had spoken a word to the plumber.

"Humph! so you've got around to attend to the job, at last, have you?" Thackera growled. "Why don't you attend to orders, more promptly?"

"Orders have to wait their turn!" Lawton replied, in a rough voice. "Good many orders in ahead of yours!"

"Bah! that's always the cry. Most through, in this room?"

"Pretty near, sir. Be done, in a few minutes."

And, fearing his disguise might be detected, Lawton hastened the completion of his work in that room, and moved out of it, leaving Wrinkles a temporary prisoner, in the wardrobe.

When Lawton had left the room, Trimbal Thackera secured the door, from the inside, and then, taking a chair, sat down near his daughter.

Theo did not raise her eyes from the book she was reading, and the broker uttered a harsh, dry laugh.

"Eh? Not over your sulks yet?" he said.

"No! not over my sulks yet, sir!" Theo re-

torted, coldly. "Why do you come here, to annoy and vex me?"

"Indeed! Annoy and vex you, eh? You appear to be getting very high-minded, it seems to me. As your father, I presume I have the right to approach you, whenever I please."

"If you conduct yourself like a parent, you have. But I will not listen to any more of your attacks upon Louis Lawton."

"Humph! So you've not got that puppy off your mind yet, eh? Well, it matters not. You'll never see the scoundrel again, that's certain. It turns out that he has lately been committing numerous forgeries, and, as near as the detectives can find out, he has struck out for Canada. So you might as well settle yourself down, and be sensible. I've trouble enough without worrying about you."

"What trouble?"

"Why, my Chicago correspondents have gone up, and I lose every cent I have in the world!"

Theo looked incredulous.

"You are joking?" she said.

"Not by any means. I am ruined, my child, and deep in debt besides. Everything will be swept away, and nothing left us but the clothes we wear, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless I can rasp the single ray of hope that remains, and avert the disgrace."

"I do not understand you?"

"Then, I will explain. Paul Percival happened in my office, when I got news of my great loss. He came to ask permission to call upon me again, and when he heard of my misfortune, he offered to start me in business again, on conditions."

"On conditions?"

"Exactly. He is about to start for Europe, and wants you for his wife. He promised me financial aid, if I would gain your consent to an immediate marriage. Just think of it—before you lies the chance of a lifetime. Percival is rich, handsome and indulgent, and, as his wife, you could have every luxury that the human heart could desire—fine clothes, elegant equipages, servants, jewels, travel—everything. And at the same time, you would be lifting me from a sad financial wreck."

"Why did Mr. Percival cease to call, so suddenly?"

The broker explained, as he had been advised.

"The woman is dead, now, however, and he is only too eager to claim you as his wife."

Theo remained silent, a moment.

"If I enter into this marriage contract," she said, "it will be only as a matter of business to secure you the money you covet, for I do not love him. When is this marriage to take place?"

"To-night, as Percival starts for Europe, to-morrow."

"Very well. It must be at the church, and I shall send out a few informal invitations, for some of my intimate acquaintances."

"Of course! of course! as many as you like, only you must not seek to obtain communication with that scamp, Lou Lawton!"

"It is not likely I shall go to Canada, in search of him!" Theo retorted.

"Of course not! of course not! That's a good girl. I am glad to see you so sensible, and willing to aid your father. I will go, now, and make the arrangements. I suppose nine o'clock will be about the right hour?"

"I suppose so," Theo replied, briefly.

Overflowing with delight, Trimbal Thackera left the room, and, soon after, the house, going direct to the Percival Brothers' office, where he found the junior member, alone.

"Ah! glad to see you, my boy. I've perfected arrangements, I think, providing there is nothing to hinder an immediate marriage!"

"Why the haste?" Percival asked.

"Well, you see, a lady friend of Theo's is to sail from New York, to-morrow afternoon, on the Bothnia, and Theo will only consent to marry you on conditions that the wedding takes place, quietly, to-night, and you hasten to New York, and sail on the Bothnia, to-morrow!"

"Indeed! Well, I guess we can arrange it. I had not thought of leaving quite so soon, but a few days cannot matter much. Where are we to be married? I'll leave you to engineer it all."

"Very well. The ceremony will take place at the church, to-night, at nine o'clock."

"Very good. I will make preparations, then."

And so, Trimbal Thackera went back to his own office, feeling more exultant than he had ever felt before in all his life.

"So, I will baffle my royal dad, after all!" he muttered, "and he can go back to Herkimer, without his prize. Maybe he will try to make

me trouble, but, pooh! Once Theo is Percival's wife, and en route for Europe, I'll pack up, and clear out, myself, for more congenial climes, where, with the twenty-five thousand, I can lay the base of another fortune. Hal! hal! even if the law fails to get hold of young Lawton, it will be a sweet triumph, to place Theo beyond his reach."

But the broker, literally, was counting his chickens before they were hatched!

CHAPTER XI.

PAUL PERCIVAL'S WIFE.

As soon as he heard Trimbal Thackera descend the stairs, Wrinkles lost no time in leaving the wardrobe, for he had nearly smothered among the dresses and feminine fixings.

"Lordy! I'm glad the gov'nor sloped quick as he did, or I should have had to hev a coroner set onter me!" he declared, to Theo. "Wonder if my pard is through yet?"

"Yes; I think I heard him leave the house while my father was here."

"Spect the old gent back soon?"

"I presume he will not be in again until noon."

"All right! He needn't hurry hisself!" and the gamin helped himself to a seat. "So ye'r goin' ter litch up in weddin'-harness with Paul Percival?"

"Certainly not. You overheard our conversation then?"

"You bet! Nature provided me wi' ears to hear with an' I allus gives 'em the full length o' the rope. So ye ain't going to marry Percival?"

"I am not. I only pretended to accept of him in order to gain time to escape."

"Ye'r goin' wi' your gran'dad, hey?"

"I certainly shall, if I can."

"That'll tickle the old feller nigh inter fits, an' I'll bet you'll like the change. Lou Lawton will feel bad, however."

"Do you think so?"

"Oh! yes, Lordy; ye orter know how much that feller is in luv wi' yer, Miss Thack. He jest antydotes on yer, an' does nothin' but talk about you, an' study luv-poetry. He's a goner—sure case! If ye go 'way from Philamyndaph, an' he don't get ter see ye any more, he'll tear all the hair out o' his head an' go suicide hisself."

"Oh! I hope he would do nothing as rash as that," Theo said, with a smile.

"You bet he would! Tell ye what, Lawty is a bu's'in' good feller, an' all the gals is crazy over him, but he don't keer fer none o' 'em 'cept you. I should think you'd do the fair thing an' marry him. I guess yer like him, don't ye?"

Theo looked confused.

"I don't know as you have any right to ask, sir."

"What! me? Jerusalem! that's nothin'! I'm all right. Lawty an' me's pards. I'd jest jump up, knock my heels together, an' holler ter see you an' him git spliced. Say, now, you like him, don't ye—an' you'll marry him, won't ye, an' take him out on the farm, where he kin 'tend ter the chickens, an' ride the cows to the cheese factory, an' do lots o' sich chores?"

Theo laughed merrily.

"You have a funny idea of farm life," she said. "And as for marrying Mr. Lawton, if he wants me, I have no doubt but what he will make the proposal personally."

"What! ain't he 'popped' yet?"

"No, he hasn't 'popped' yet."

Wrinkles gave vent to a prolonged whistle.

"Well, I'll be durned!" he exclaimed. "He's a slow poke not to have 'popped' long afore this. Jest you wait till I see him, an' I'll stir him up. An' now, how 'bout yer weddin' wi' Percival? I want to know the particulars afore I go."

"I will tell you my plan. I shall make preparations to marry Mr. Percival. I shall send out a few invitations, and shall even proceed to the church. Among the invitations will be one to my grandfather and one each to yourself and Mr. Lawton. On showing the invitations at the door you will be admitted to the church. As soon as the ceremony begins my grandfather is to step forward and forbid the banns, as he has the right to do, being my legal guardian, and I will refuse to marry Percival, and call upon my grandfather for protection. Won't that be a capital plan?—and so romantic, too!"

"Kerect! That'll knock yer dad's plans all silly!" Wrinkles agreed.

"I care not. Father has been a very cruel and unnatural parent to me, and if I can find a pleasant home with my grandfather, I shall be only too glad to accept of it."

Wrinkles conversed with her for some time, and then, watching his opportunity, slipped from the house.

"Terraplas an' tom-cats!" he muttered, excitedly, as he wended his way toward the Reese House, where he expected to find Lawton and old Mr. Thackera. "Won't there be a high old time at the church to-night! 'Spect I orter be doin' my first turn at night watch, but I can't miss the circus, no-how."

Instead of going direct to the Reese House, he first sought a telegraph office, and sent a message to the Percivals that he would be unable to report for duty that night. He then went to the hotel and found Lawton and the farmer, who welcomed him warmly, and at once began to ply him with questions.

Accordingly, Wrinkles related what he had overheard, and what was Theo Thackera's singular plan.

"Mighty! but she's a cute one!" the farmer chuckled. "It's just a capital ideal. Trim, the scamp, won't dare to raise no fuss, lest I hev him arrested."

"The plan may work all right," Lawton said,

thoughtfully, "but it will be necessary that Wrinkles and I be more carefully disguised, and our movements in no wise connected with yours lest I be suspected and arrested. We must enter separately, and, if possible, obtain seats distant from each other."

They conversed for some time; then Wrinkles called Lawton to one side.

"See heer, d'ye know what I think o' you?" the gamin demanded, putting his arms akimbo and looking serious.

"No, I can't say as I do," Lawton replied, somewhat puzzled. "What do you think of me?"

"Why, I think ye'r a big numbskull, a nigner-amus, an' a softy!" Wrinkles declared, emphatically.

"Why, what in the world have I done to merit this sudden attack?" Lawton demanded, in great surprise.

"Ye hain't done nothin'—that's just what's the matter. Ye orter be ashamed o' yerself! Why, ef I was you, I'd go take a jump inter a sewer!"

"I do not understand you, Wrinkles. What in the world is the matter? What do you mean, anyhow?"

"Mean? Waal, I should think you wouldn't have the gall to ask that. Say, s'posin' you was a gal an' a feller comed to see ye, an' the feller hedn't the gumption ter pop the question—wouldn't you feel like givin' him the G. B. from the house?"

"I don't know. Do you mean to insinuate that I've not got the gumption to pop the question? Is that what you're driving at?"

"You bet!"

"And what causes such a funny thought to enter your mind?"

"Why, yer see, I ax d'yer gal if she was goin' ter marry ye, an' she alowed you hadn't puckered up the courage to pop yet, but presumed that if you got around to ax her, in the course of the next hundred years, it would be all right."

"Get out! You're kidding me, you young rascal."

"Not a bit of it! I axed the gal if you'd 'popped,' and she said no, you hadn't; so, how d'yer 'spect a gal is goin' ter marry yer 'thout ye ax her? Lor' golly! if it had been me, I'd a-popped afore I'd seen her half a dozen times."

Lawton hardly knew what to say.

"Maybe I have been too backward," he admitted. "But, don't fear; I'll make up for lost time when I do see her."

As there was nothing in particular to do but wait the coming of the night, Wrinkles left Lawton and the farmer at the hotel, and went forth upon the street—his natural home, as it were.

In the course of his wanderings he passed the Thackera office, just in the nick of time to witness an incident quite interesting to him—viz., the kicking of a man from the office into the street, and the kicker none other than Trimbal Thackera, whose feet, in his younger days, had been permitted to grow without restraint.

The final kick, a powerful one of its kind, had lifted the victim clear from the office step and landed him flat upon his face on the sidewalk.

Without further ceremony, Thackera re-entered his office as if nothing had happened.

The man who had come forth under such unfavorable circumstances was none other than Vose Van Vetchin, the broker's nephew.

Wrinkles saw the kicking affair, and this idea instantly occurred to him.

"Old Trimbles an' the dude hes hed a quarrel. Wonder ef I can't pump his dudship, if I go and make up with him?"

He quickly crossed the street and assisted Van Vetchin to arise.

"Yer got h'listed, in earnest, didn't you?" the gamin said, brushing him off.

"Did you see him kick me?" the young man demanded, quickly.

"You bet I did!"

"I am glad of it. I am badly injured, I fear. Will you assist me to the Pennsylvania Hospital?"

"Of course I will. What's the matter 'twixt you and Trimbles?"

"Oh! that will be made clear, by and by," Van Vetchin replied. "Don't press me to talk, for I do not feel like it."

Taking him by the arm, Wrinkles helped him along, and led the way toward the hospital.

Van Vetchin appeared to be in great pain, and by the time they reached the hospital walls, he fainted, and Wrinkles was obliged to summon assistance to have him carried into the institution.

Not knowing what account Van Vetchin might want to give, as to the origin of his injuries, Wrinkles made only the simple statement that he had found the young man lying on the pavement, and had assisted him to walk to the hospital.

He was then dismissed, and took his departure, first having obtained permission to call again.

He was returning toward the Reese House, when he met a woman, poorly clad, and carrying an infant in her arms—a woman with a pale, wan face, that had once been very pretty, and eyes that were unnaturally bright.

She paused, as he was about to pass her, and put out her hand.

"Please, sir—I will detain you but a moment," she said, in a distressed voice. "I do not wish to beg alms of you—only information. I am a stranger in this city, and cannot find my way."

"Where do you want to go?" Wrinkles asked, with interest, for he saw that she was a lady who had known both refinement, and better days.

"I don't really know, sir. I am in search of my husband, who deserted me, and when I tried to follow him, had me put in an insane asylum. They released me, however, on finding that I was not in-

sane, and I have come in search of my cruel husband, who, I have learned, is a rich man."

"Where did you come from?"

"Richmond, Virginia, sir."

"And so you expect to find your husband in a big city, like Phila., eh? Reckon you've tackled a purty big job. Who is your husband?"

"His name is Percival, sir—Paul Percival. My name is Anna Percival."

Wrinkles's face betrayed his astonishment and he gave vent to a prolonged whistle.

"Paul Percival, eh? An' you're his wife, are you?"

"Yes, sir. Oh! do you know him, sir?"

"Well, I should snort up a snake! Aire that his kid?"

"This is our child, sir."

"An' hev you got the dockyments ter prove thet you're Paul Percival's wife?"

"Yes, sir; I have our marriage-certificate in my pocket."

"Then you come along with me. There's goin' to be a circus ter-night, an' yer got to be one o' the performers."

"I do not understand you!" and the woman looked frightened. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I said!" and Wrinkles put his thumbs under his armpits, and struck an aldermanic posture. "I, madam, am a detective, and fortunate in meetin' yer. Yer truant hubby aire goin' ter git married to another gal, an' I want yer to be present, to hev a say in the matter."

"My husband to be married, sir—and that, too, knowing that I am alive?"

"That's just what's the matter. You come along wi' me, an' I'll find you a place to stay till to-night, when yer can confront yer hub right at the altar."

Satisfied, at length, that Wrinkles was not misrepresenting matters, Mrs. Percival accompanied him, very glad, indeed, to have found such a friend.

Wrinkles took her to Ram Cat Alley, and installed her, temporarily, in the home of the plumber.

He then returned to the heart of the city.

Hunting up Lawton, the two spent a good part of the remainder of the day in perfecting new disguises, preparatory to attending the church in the evening.

Lawton made up as a fashionable young man of the period, and what with luxuriant blonde side-whiskers, and gold-rimmed eye-glasses, he had no resemblance whatever to Lou Lawton, the ash-cart driver.

Wrinkles's disguise was none the less tony and perfect, and there seemed hardly a possibility that the two would be recognized, unless, indeed, suspecting their presence, Trimbal Thackera might set a watch for them.

This, they argued, was not probable; and yet, it was the very thing the wily broker had done.

Anticipating that all might not go right, he had employed a detective to be near the church, in case he was wanted.

CHAPTER XII.

TWO ARRESTS.

The church in which the wedding of Paul Percival and Theo Thackera was to have taken place, was located but a short distance from Theo's home, and was the place where she and her father had been in the habit of attending divine worship, every Sabbath.

That evening by a quarter of nine, a number of richly-dressed couples could be seen entering the church, some of whom came in carriages. It was thus evident that there was to be quite a turnout, despite the haste of the arrangements.

Inside the church was brilliantly lighted, and all the guests who came, were seated by the regular ushers.

At five minutes of nine, Paul Percival entered, in company with his brother, and a moment later, Trimbal Thackera followed, with Theo leaning upon his arm.

She was attired in an elegant traveling costume, and looked exquisitely charming.

Silence reigned throughout the church, as Theo and Percival stood before the minister, and the words that were to make them one, were uttered, in a deep, sonorous tone.

Finally came the query—was there any person present who had aught to say, why the marriage should not be solemnized?

"Yes!" a stern voice cried, and Theodore Thackera arose, from one of the rear seats and advanced down the aisle. "As that girl's legal guardian, I forbid the banns!"

To add to the general consternation of the moment, Theo broke away from Percival, and ran and threw himself in the farmer's embrace.

"Oh! Grandpa! grandpa! I am so glad you have come!" she cried.

"What is the meaning of this?" Paul Percival demanded, angrily, turning to Trimbal Thackera, who, white and trembling had sunk back upon one of the altar chairs, unable even to utter a word of protest.

"I demand an explanation, sir!"

"I can give ye all that explanation that is necessary!" the farmer declared. "In the first place, I was made the legal guardian of this girl, sixteen years ago, bec'ase my son, there, wasn't fit to take keer of her. He stole her from me, however, an' I've never bin able to git track of her, till now."

"Your guardianship over her, sir, is void, owing to the length of time the young lady has resided with her father!" Percival declared. "Miss Thackera is old enough to choose a guardian to her own suiting."

"An' I choose my grandpa!" Theo cried, in a clear, decisive tone. "I cannot marry you, Mr. Percival!"

"Cannot marry me! Why not? I demand a

satisfactory explanation. This interruption is highly disgraceful, and an insult to me!"

"I'll tell ye why the gal can't marry you!" the old man from Herkimer declared, grimly. "One reason is, because she don't want to, an' I don't want her to! But a better reason is, because you've got a wife and child already, an' thar they are."

He pointed toward a vestibule door of the church, through which Mrs. Percival and her babe were just entering, accompanied by a burly policeman.

Paul Percival grew deathly white, and speaking a few hasty words to his brother in an undertone, he marched up the aisle, until he encountered his wife and the officer, when a short conversation was held, and then they all left the church together.

Then Trimbal Thackera arose.

"As there will be no marriage ceremony, the invited guests will confer a favor by quietly dispersing!" he said, with great dignity, and the surprised company lost no time in following his request.

Theodore Thackera, his son, and granddaughter, remained standing near the altar until the audience should have departed.

Among the last of the latter to leave the auditorium of the church was Lou Lawton, in disguise.

As he stepped out into the auditorium of the church, a man, whom he recognized as a city detective, touched him on the shoulder and said, in a quick, low tone:

"Lawton, I have a warrant for your arrest. Will you accompany me quietly, or will I be forced to summon assistance?"

Lawton well knew that it would only attract attention, and that, too, without it availing him anything to offer resistance, and so he signified his willingness to accompany the detective.

The arrest, therefore, was unsuspected by the other guests.

When the church was cleared by all but the Thackeras, and the minister, Trimbal Thackera, addressing his father, said:

"Come! It is no use to stay. My carriage awaits outside, and we will go to my house, a short distance away, and come to an understanding."

"Very well, Trim; I'm ready. But don't ye try to play no trick on yer old dad, or there'll be trouble in the camp."

Trimbal Thackera made no reply, but led the way toward the door, the farmer and Theo following.

The Thackera coupe was drawn up before the church, and the broker assisted Theo in, and then got in himself.

Quickly dropping the window, however, he thrust his head out, hailing a policeman who chanced to be passing.

"Arrest this man!" he cried, pointing to his father, "and hold him at the Central until I have time to notify his keepers. He is a lunatic relative of mine, escaped from a New York State asylum, and has found his way here. I will call at the Central in the next hour!" and signaling the driver, the coupe rolled off.

All this had been done so quickly that it dumfounded Mr. Thackera, senior, and before he could utter a word of remonstrance, he found himself in the iron grasp of the policeman.

"Come!" that worthy ordered, in true metropolitan style. "You've got to go with me, old gent."

"I hev, hev I?" the farmer grunted. "What have I got to go with you, for?"

"Cause I was told to arrest you. Ye'r crazy."

"Ye'r a darned liar!" the old man cried, indignantly. "I ain't no more crazy ner you aire, ner half so much."

"Can't help that. My orders is to pull ye in, so cum along, an' no palaver about it."

"D'ye knew that man as told ye to arrest me?"

"Course I do. That's Mr. Thackera."

"Humph! Waal, he was lyin' to ye, so he could get off with that gal. He's my son, the infernal scallawag."

"Oh! come off! That's too thin. You come along wi' me, or I'll give you a taste of this club."

"Oh! I'll go wi' ye! An' I kin prove who I am, thet I ain't crazy, ner never was inside a crazy house. It's all thet boy's doin's. He's a reg'lar blackleg, an' was even mean enough to rob his own dad. Ef ye waster know 'bout me, jest tellegraff up ter Herkimer, York State, an' inquire ef they know old Thede Thackera. Ax 'em ef he ain't sane, an' ax 'em ef he didn't start fer Philerdelfy, a few days ago, wi' two car-load o' the best yearlin' steers as was ever raised, in that county. Mighty! but ef's enuff ter make a preacher swear, cussed ef it ain't, ter be treated in this way."

The noble officer of the law, however, maintained a grim silence, and at last the Central Station was reached.

Here the officer reported the charge against the prisoner who was closely questioned by the police clerk, a shrewd, far-seeing individual, who could usually tell a rogue at a glance.

"I guess we shall have to lock you up, till morning, grandpapi!" he said. "In the meantime, as you don't appear to be very crazy, I'll telegraph to Herkimer, and inquire about you."

"Thankee! thankee! If you'll jest do that, I'll be darned if I don't make ye a present uv the purtiest Holstein bull an' heifer, ye ever sot eyes on next spring!"

And so the farmer was locked up, for the night.

As might be supposed, Trimbal Thackera did not put in an appearance at the station that night. Such indeed, had been the furthest from his intention.

As the old farmer had surmised, the arrest was but a "drive" by which to gain time, and as his aged parent lay in the cheerless cell, the rascally broker and his daughter were speeding away beyond Philadelphia's city limits.

CHAPTER XIII.

WRINKLES AND THE CHIEF.

In the mean time, what has become of Wrinkles?

In his dude disguise he had obtained admission to the church, after arranging to have Mrs. Percival enter with a policeman, about the time her appearance would be most effective.

When Trimbal Thackera dismissed the guests, Wrinkles was one of the first to leave the church, and took his stand on the opposite side of the street.

From here he saw Lawton's arrest, and also that of old Thede Thackera.

When the Thackera carriage rolled away, Wrinkles hastened after it, walking as fast as he could without attracting attention.

The vehicle soon distanced him, however, and when he arrived in the vicinity of the broker's residence, he found no coupe in sight, as he had half expected to.

"Guess there ain't no use spendin' any more time skirmishin' in this direction!" he muttered. "And as Lou and old Thack are locked up for the night, I allow I better git fer Ram Cat, and collar onto a chunk of snooze. Ther's no tellin' what'll be goin' on ter-morrer; an' 'sides that, I want ter git me old togs on. These 'ere high-tone goods don't suit me fer nothin', nohow. The old togs ain't so purty, but they're more nattera; somehow, I don't take to bein' a dude."

The succession of events that had recently transpired had thoroughly fatigued the boy, and he was not sorry to get a chance to obtain much-needed rest.

He knew that he could do neither Lawton nor the elder Thackera any good until morning, and so there could be but little use of his going to the police station.

He was en route for his humble home, and was passing the entrance to the Pennsylvania Hospital, when his thoughts recurred to Vose Van Vetchin.

"I wonder how the feller's gittin' on?" he muttered. "Guess I'll have to inquire in the mornin'."

Just then a man came out of the hospital grounds upon the street, and Wrinkles at once recognized him as one of the attendant surgeons.

Instantly it occurred to the boy to make an inquiry concerning Van Vetchin.

"Say, mister," he hailed, "did you just come out of the hospital, sir?"

"I did!" was the brief reply.

"An' can you tell me how the young feller is who got kicked?"

"Ah! what do you know about him?" the surgeon demanded, eagerly.

"I helped him get to the hospital, sir."

"Then you're the very one we want. The patient is dying, and being about to make an ante-mortem statement, wishes particularly to see you."

"He really ain't a-goin' to die, is he?"

"Yes. There is no hope for him. Come with me."

Wonderingly Wrinkles obeyed, removing his false mustache as he did so.

"Here's a go!" he muttered to himself. "If the young feller dies, that'll be a clincher on Trimbal Thack."

They entered the hospital, and soon reached the ward where Vose Van Vetchin lay upon a bed, looking white and haggard.

He recognized Wrinkles, despite the boy detective's dudsish dress.

"Ah! I am glad you have come!" he said, in a faint voice. "I was afraid I would not see you again."

"You look bad!" Wrinkles observed. "What can I do for you?"

"Nothing, more than that I want you to tell the truth about the kicking affair, when you are called upon to do so. You saw me kicked?"

"Yes."

"And saw who kicked me?"

"You bet!"

"Very well, I want you to give your testimony, against my uncle. Will you do it?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. I am not long for this world, but want the wrong righted. The kick that landed me in the street, so injured me, internally, that there is no hope for my recovery. As soon as the lawyer arrives, however, I will make my ante-mortem statement."

A lawyer soon arrived, and in his presence and that of Wrinkles and the two surgeons, young Van Vetchin made his statement.

"My name is Vose Van Vetchin," he said, "and by his second marriage to my aunt, Trimbal Thackera, the broker, became my uncle. From my father's estate, I inherited an annual dowry of five thousand dollars, my aunt being my guardian. After her marriage, Trimbal got the matter into his hands, and sometimes when I wanted money, I got it, and sometimes I didn't, depending on what sort of a mood he was in."

Here he was forced to pause, his voice growing weak. Stimulants were administered, however, and in a few minutes Van Vetchin went on.

"A short time before I was brought here, I went to Thackera's office, to make a raise of some money, with the intention of going over to New York. I found my uncle in a bad humor, and when I asked for money he grew violent, and ordered me out of the office. I told him I would not leave until my demand was satisfied. Then, he threw open the door, and kicked me into the street. He kicked me three times. The last and hardest kick, was witnessed by this boy, who assisted me to reach the hospital."

"Is this so?" the lawyer asked, turning to Wrinkles.

"It aire."

"Do you know this young man?"

"See'd him, several times."

"Do you know Trimbal Thackera?"

"You bet, I does!"

"Did you recognize him as the man who kicked Van Vetchin?"

"I did, dead sure!"

"Would you take your oath it was Trimbal Thackera?"

"Every time, you bet!"

"There's something else I must say!" Van Vetchin spoke up. "I feel that I am failing fast, and won't last long, and before I die, I want my conscience cleared. A short time since, I entered my uncle's office, and found my uncle lying upon the floor, insensible. It appears that, during a quarrel he had been knocked down, by a fellow named Lawton. As I was greatly in need of money, I extracted my uncle's wallet from his pocket, and thus the suspicion of the theft fell upon Lawton. Trimbal Thackera swore out a warrant for his arrest on the charge of assault and robbery, but I have not heard of Lawton's being arrested. Should he be arrested, I want him cleared of the theft, as the wallet is in my pocket, intact, I not having the courage to spend any of the money."

With this explanation Van Vetchin sunk back among the pillows, and closed his eyes.

"Lawton has been arrested," Wrinkles said, to the lawyer, "and this will help to clear him."

Van Vetchin was again revived, and made oath as to the correctness of his statement.

Then, bidding him good-by, Wrinkles, and the lawyer, whose name was John Smythe, left the hospital.

"Do you think Van Vetchin will live until morning?" Wrinkles asked.

"No!" was the reply. "He may not survive, an hour. I want you to accompany me to police headquarters!"

"Goin' ter git a warrant out fer Trimbal Thackera, eh?"

"Yes. He must be arrested."

"S'posin' ye d'n't git him?"

"Oh! that will be no trouble; the chief of police knows where he resides."

"Bur, mebbe he ain't there?"

"Oh! I dare say he is."

Wrinkles, however, in his own private opinion, was not so sure about it.

It had occurred to him, that, maybe, the broker would take advantage of the night to get out of the city, taking Theo with him. If such a thing should be, it would doubtless be a job of considerable magnitude to effect a capture.

On their arrival at the Central Station, they found the chief of police still in his office, late as it was, and Smythe was accorded an interview, in which he delivered the ante-mortem statement, Wrinkles also being present.

The chief surveyed the gamin, keenly, as he came across his name, in the document.

"Are you the boy whom I've seen blacking boots, frequently, in this vicinity?" was the interrogation.

"Bet I am!" Wrinkles replied. "I've even shined them quitoes o' yourn. Reckon ye hardly know'd me, in these togs."

"You are a different-looking lad, altogether. Did you witness this kicking affair?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why did you not report it, here?"

"Humph! Yer don't s'pose I'm goin' ter wear my taps off, till I git a detective badge, do yer?"

The chief smiled.

"You keep yourself straight and you may get one of these days," he said. "We shall have to sift this matter. Thackera may not be in town, as I heard on the street to-night that he had failed."

A warrant was issued for the broker's arrest, and an officer detailed to serve it at once.

Bound to keep posted on what was going on, Wrinkles accompanied the officer.

In due time they reached the Thackera residence, which was dark, the inmates, if there were any, probably being abed.

The bell had to be pulled several times before the door opened and the colored servant-boy appeared.

"I want to see Mr. Thackera," the officer said.

"He's not at home, sah," the boy announced.

"Not at home? Where is he?"

"Dunno, sah."

"Is his daughter at home?" Wrinkles asked.

"No, sah."

"Is his wife in?" the officer demanded.

"Yes, sah."

"Tell her I wish to see her at once, then."

The darky skurried away, leaving the door ajar.

In a few minutes a lady came to the door; she was young and pretty, but very fragile, and attired in a wrapper.

"Do you wish to see me—I am Mrs. Thackera," she said, seeming anxious and nervous.

"Yes, ma'am," and both men doffed their hats.

"I am in search of Mr. Thackera, ma'am. I have a warrant for his arrest."

"Then step inside, sir, and I will give you such information as lies in my power."

They followed her into the grand parlor and became seated, while Mrs. Thackera remained standing.

"What is this warrant for—what has Mr. Thackera been doing?" she asked.

"I believe the charge is kicking a fellow into the street, ma'am, and the victim is dying."

Mrs. Thackera uttered a gasp of alarm.

"Who was the person who was kicked?"

"It was yer nephew, ma'am," Wrinkles spoke up.

"—Vose Van Vetchin. He went to your husband's

office and wanted money, and got kicked out. He's dying at the hospital from his injuries."

Mrs. Thackera covered her face with her hands for a moment, and seemed deeply affected.

At length she looked up, and said:

"I cannot say where you will find Mr. Thackera, as I have seen neither him nor his daughter since they went to the church. I was ill and did not go. As I have just heard, however, that my husband is insolvent, it may be possible that he has fled from the city. I hope to goodness he is apprehended, for, although I have been his wife but a short time, he has made my life very miserable."

"Has he got a place in the country?" Wrinkles asked.

"He has a country seat, somewhere about fifty miles from the city, I have heard, but as he never gave me any information regarding it, I can give you none. I do not even know in what direction it is, nor whether it is in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, or Delaware."

"Doubtless we can find out. Do you expect that he will come back here?"

"I think it hardly probable. If he has failed, as I hear, he will not be likely to come back and face his creditors."

"How about this house?" Wrinkles inquired.

"It is mine. He assigned it to me, some time ago, in payment for money he had borrowed of me."

"If this is all the information you can give us we will go!" the officer said.

"It is all, sir."

So Wrinkles and the officer went back to the Central and reported.

"He has undoubtedly decamped!" Chief Stewart said. Then, to Wrinkles, he added: "You come here to-morrow at ten o'clock. I may want you."

Bowing, and wondering if there was not a bare possibility that he was to be made a full-fledged detective, Wrinkles took his departure, and once more set out for that classic neighborhood known as Ram Cat Alley.

CHAPTER XIV.

HUNTING CLEWS.

WHEN Wrinkles arose the next morning he felt much refreshed and better prepared for the work before him.

Eating a hasty breakfast he started up-town, stopping, en route, at the Pennsylvania Hospital.

He found that Van Vetchin was still alive, but sleeping, and the attending surgeon announced that there now was some faint hope of his recovery.

From the hospital, the gamin then made his way to Eighth and Chestnut streets.

He was now attired in his old bootblack regalia, and by nine o'clock, with the aid of his box, he had succeeded in accumulating quite a number of nickels, as well as considerable dirt, on his face, and appeared to feel in the best of spirits, and thoroughly at home.

"No use o' talkin'—old duds an' I gits along ther best together!" he muttered, as he finally trudged away toward police headquarters. "Spect ef I was ter git ter be President uv the United States, I'd want ter be shinin' sum ov the senators' boots."

When he arrived at the Central Station he found that the old farmer from Herkimer had been discharged, and when he saw his gamin friend he was overjoyed, and kept the boy busy for some time, answering questions and making explanations.

A little later, through the instrumentality of Van Vetchin's confession, Lou Lawton was also set at liberty.

When ten o'clock arrived Wrinkles, accompanied by his two friends, entered the private office of Chief Stewart.

Wrinkles introduced his two friends, and explained that Theodore Thackera was also anxious for the apprehension of his son.

"I have had further inquiries made, in regard to Trimbald Thackera," the chief said, "and am inclined to the belief that he has gone to his country residence, wherever that may be—a point I have not yet gained any information upon."

"On course he has—on course he has!" Theodore Thackera spoke up. "He's a cute one, Trim is, an' ef ye don't watch out sharp he'll give ye the slip, fer all. Why, darn it, hain't he dodged the law an' detectives o' York State fer sixteen years, an' never bin found, till I'll arnt o' his whereabouts?"

"Is he wanted, up in York State?" the chief asked.

"Yas, he is—bad!"

"On what charge?"

"Embezzlement, an' manslaughter. He was accused o' embezzlin' money from a bank, whar he clerked, an' he hit the president o' the consarn on the head, an' shot another clerk, who fired on him. He then escaped. The president went crazy, an' the clerk died."

"I think I remember something about the case. And so, this son of yours is the same party."

"Ter be sure he is, and the sooner he's under lock and key, the better. I'm goin' in search uv him, myself, an' these two fellers aire goin' ter g'lang wi' me."

"I was thinking of utilizing Wrinkles myself!" the chief said. "I want him to accompany a detective whom I shall set to work on this case. From what appears your son will be wanted for more than one offense, and I shall spare no effort to secure his capture, if he can be found in the State. If he leaves the State, then a private detective will need to be sent after him."

"Ye can't hev the boy!" Thackera, Sr., declared. "He's goin' long wi' me, ef I hev ter mor'gage my farms, an' hire a golden chariot to ride in."

"Yas, I shall go wi' gran'paw!" Wrinkles an-

nounced. "But, I tell yer how we kin work it, Cap' Jest trot out yer purtiest detective, an' we four will alagamate inter a detective quartette, an' travel an' work tergether. Yer feller kin kerry the warrant. I'll do ther brain work an' figgerin', Lawty kin do the sluggin', if there's any ter be did, an' gran'paw, he kin luk on. But, mind ye, I want a badge."

The chief seemed to favor the idea, and leaving his guests in the office, entered an adjoining room. When he returned, he was accompanied by a tall sharp-featured man, whom he introduced as Detective Gray.

He then took Wrinkles into the mayor's office, and when the boy returned to the presence of his friends he was sworn in as a special detective, and duly equipped for business.

When arrangements were completed, the quartette adjourned to the American Hotel, which was to be their present head-quarters.

Here a consultation was held, to determine upon some plan of action.

"One thing is certain!" Detective Gray said. "We cannot go to work practically, until we have something to go to work on. If Trimbald Thackera had a farm, we must locate it before we leave Philadelphia. So I will make careful inquiries, and try to find out where the farm lies. In the mean time, boy, you'd better get on some more becoming clothing."

"Not muchly!" Wrinkles returned, independently. "Wouldn't part wi' these togs fer all Vanderbilt's railroads. An' so, ef you don't want ride in the same train wi' me, yer kin take'r lokermotive. You go ahead wi' yer inquiries, an' I'll do a turn in thet line myself, an' ef I don't find where Thack is, first, I'll buy the oysters."

"Very well. It's a bargain."

Leaving the farmer and Lawton at the hotel, the detectives set out on their search.

As Gray desired to interview Mrs. Thackera, Wrinkles took another course. He revisited the Pennsylvania Hospital, and found Van Vetchin awake and able to talk, but very weak.

He knew nothing whatever, in regard to Trimbald Thackera's country seat.

Somewhat disappointed, Wrinkles left the hospital.

"Guess these togs ain't suitable for present use," was his conclusion, when he had received gruff answers to his inquiries. "I don't look stylish 'nuff fer a detective."

During the day, accordingly, he supplied himself with a serviceable business suit—after which, his inquiries met with more respectful answers.

During the day he endeavored to get an interview with Paul Percival, but did not succeed, being informed that he was sick in bed.

At last, in despair, he was returning thoughtfully toward the American, when something occurred to him that caused his face to brighten. A couple of months before he remembered seeing Trimbald Thackera enter an "Employment Office." To many, this simple fact would have had no significance at all, but to the gamin detective, this mental query occurred:

"Trimbs went to the employment office, an' likely he wanted to engage help. Mebbe he wanted it fer his house hyer in town, an' mebbe he didn't. Mebbe he wanted to hire some one to go to the country to work. If so, the agent likely knows where the country seat is. By the way, that agent got pulled in, fer gittin' a girl a bad job, an' 'most likely he an' the law is on the outs. If so, he won't 'preciate me, till he sees me badge—then, he'll git talkative."

The result of these reflections was that the young detective changed his course, and sought out the particular employment office he had reference to.

Arrived there, he found the proprietor alone in his outer room seated at a table—a thin, pale-faced individual, who looked as if the profits of his institution were insufficient to keep him in good hearty food.

Anticipating that Wrinkles was in search of a job, he cordially invited him to take a seat—which Wrinkles did, and at the same time exposed his badge.

"I am a detective, and my name is Wrinkles, sir!" he announced, with all the dignity he could summon. "Your name, I believe, is Smithers."

"It is. What do you want of me?"

"I want some information, and you'll find it to your interest to keep nothing back. Refer to your books and see if a man did not apply here some two months ago in search of help, the applicant's name being Trimbald Thackera."

"Yes; I remember the name."

"Did he get help?"

"Yes."

"What sort of help—for city or country?"

"For the country. He hired a man to attend to a property for the winter."

"Ah! What was this man's name?"

"James Mulligan."

"Did he go to the country?"

"I believe so. Thackera paid me my fees, when the two met me, and they went out together."

"Where was this place located?"

"That I cannot tell you. I heard something mentioned about Harrisburg, but that's all I know about it."

Wrinkles knit his brows, and remained silent a moment.

It was provoking to get partly on track, and then be stopped short.

"Mulligan didn't stay at the place, I guess, as I saw him in the city the other day!" the agent volunteered.

"Ah! did you? Do you know where he lives?"

The agent referred to his register book.

"He lived at No. —, Barker street, at the time he registered here."

"Perhaps I can find him there now, then," and thanking his informant, Wrinkles took leave.

"On track, I'll bet ten cents tew a terrapin!" he muttered, greatly elated. "If I can gobble onto Mister Mulligan, I'll pump him as dry as a cloud o' smoke."

He made his way to the Barker street house, and inquired for Mulligan. An old woman who answered to the name of Mrs. Mulligan, announced that "Jamey" was 'tendin' bar at the corner saloon, and there the boy detective found him—a burly, but pleasant young man, inclined to be affable.

Yes, he had worked for Trimbald Thackera at his country seat, but not liking the location on account of its loneliness, he had given up the job, and returned to the city. Yes, he could tell where the place was. It was about twelve miles from York, Pa., up in a mountainous piece of country, and there were no habitations very near to it. If he were paid for it, Mr. Mulligan could guide a person to the place, and no doubt be of valuable assistance.

Telling him he would consider the matter, Wrinkles took his departure.

CHAPTER XV.

OFF ON THE TRAIL.

HAVING acquired so much information, Wrinkles hastened back to the hotel. Gray had just returned, unsuccessful, and when the gamin announced the result of his search he was warmly praised.

"The oysters are on me!" Gray acknowledged, "but we must not delay to eat them, now. If we expect to make a capture no time must be lost. By all means, Mulligan must go with us!"

"On course he must!" the farmer declared. "I'll fut all ther bills. An', as ye say, we mustn't lose no time. Trim, the scamp, may get wind thet we're after him an' not stay at the country place. He's as sharp as a steel-trap, an' ye can't be too cute fer him."

Accordingly, arrangements were made for an early departure. Wrinkles hastened to engage the services of Mulligan, and by sunset the entire party were on board the cars, steaming toward Harrisburg.

Mulligan declared that he had no doubt but what Trimbald Thackera and his daughter would be found at the country seat, when it was made known to him that the object of the journey was to arrest the broker.

"They likely drove to some station, outside of Philadelphia," he said, "and then took the cars for York. So they'll get to The Firs, as the place is called, but a few hours in advance of us."

When they reached Harrisburg, they were obliged to wait two hours before they could catch a train for York. Accordingly, it was late in the night when they reached their destination.

Detective Gray had agreed that it would be best to go on to The Firs, at night, but when they arrived in York, no conveyances were to be obtained until morning.

This was a serious disappointment, but there was no help for it, and to go to a hotel, until morning, was the next thing to do.

But while the others of the party retired for the night, Mulligan did not.

When satisfied that the rest were to bed, he left the hotel, and walked to another, a few blocks distant.

Here he examined the register, carefully, but the name, Thackera, did not appear upon any of the recent pages. He was about to make some inquiry of the night-clerk, when a door opened, and Trimbald Thackera entered the office!

The two men were thus brought suddenly face to face and the recognition was mutual.

Thackera was looking pale and haggard, and the color of his eyes indicated that he had been drinking some.

"Ah! you here?" he said, approaching Mulligan. "How does that happen?"

"If you will come over here, I'll tell you," was the significant reply, and the young Irishman led the way to a cluster of chairs, in a quiet corner of the office.

Thackera followed, evidently half expecting what was coming.

When they were seated, Mulligan lit a cigar, and surveyed the broker, speculatively. He was a shrewd, discerning fellow, and evidently calculated to seize on a stake whenever a chance offered.

"You want to know why I am here?" he said, interrogatively. "Well, I'll tell you: I came here to assist in finding you!"

"What?"

"I came here to assist in finding you—to guide a party of detectives to The Firs!"

"Detectives?"

"Exactly. They're after you, hotter'n a burnin' hay-stack."

"Why are they after me? What am I wanted for?" the broker demanded, evidently trying not to betray his excitement and alarm.

"Ye'r wanted fer murder—fer kickin' a feller so he died. If they catch you, you'll get about ten years!"

"Vose Van Vetchin dead? Impossible!"

"Deader'n a pickled eel!" Mulligan declared, grimly.

"Who are the detectives?"

"A feller named Gray—a reg'lar—a boy called Wrinkles, a feller named Lawton, an' your father!" Trimbald Thackera bit his lips, fiercely.

"Where are they?" he demanded.

"At the other hotel, down the street."

"How came you to be with them?"

"The boy, Wrinkles, somehow found out I used

to work at The Firs, and hired me to guide the party, there!"

"And you'll do it?"

"That depends altogether on circumstances. If you don't want to submit to arrest, perhaps we can arrange it. How much money have you got?"

"Five thousand dollars is all I have left in the wide world, out of a once large fortune!" Thackera deliberately lied.

"Five, eh? Well, now, I'll tell you what is what: I've got the buge on you, fair an'square, and can do just as I please. If I want to let you escape, I can manage it. Ef I don't want ter let yer 'scape, ye can't. D'ye see?"

"I comprehend!" was the grim reply. "If I pay you well you will allow me to escape?"

"Exactly. You give me my price, and I'll fix things so. Here's my plan. A train goes through here, before daybreak, for Baltimore. Take the next train back for Harrisburg, and then go to Buffalo, and skip over into the Canadas—say Montreal, for instance. To give you time, I'll take the party to The Firs, in the morning. In fact, I'll keep 'em off track till you get safe into Canada. Then, if you look out, you're all right."

"Will you swear to do this?"

"I do."

"Then, what is your price?"

"Four thousand!"

"Good Heaven! That will leave me but a thousand!"

"That's your lookout, not mine!"

The broker was silent, a moment; then, he arose, his eyes gleaming.

"I have no choice but to accept your terms!" he said, grimly. "Wait here, and I'll get you the money!"

He went up-stairs, but soon returned, and laid a roll of bank notes in Mulligan's eager clutches.

"There is the money. I depend upon your honor now to help me out!"

"You can trust me. The train leaves at four o'clock, I think."

"Very well. I will take it!"

After a short conversation, the two men shook hands and separated, Mulligan returning to the other hotel, richer by far than he deserved.

But his scheming for gain was not ended. By the earliest morning train, Trimbal Thackera and Theo left York. The girl was very pale, and seemed to stand in mortal fear of the cruel parent she accompanied.

Wrinkles and the others of the pursuing party were up by daybreak, but, early as they were, Mulligan was ahead of them, and had a conveyance in waiting to take them to The Firs.

We will pass over the trip to the isolated country seat, as it was attended by no incident worthy of mention.

Of course they failed to find the Thackeras, and nothing was left for them but to return to York.

"If they ain't here, they may come yet!" Mulligan suggested.

"Hardly probable," Detective Gray replied.

"However, such a thing is possible."

He had very little to say on the return trip to York, and when they arrived there he announced that the party had better remain until the night train at any rate.

During the afternoon he and Wrinkles took a stroll about the town.

"What d'yer think about the case, anyhow, Mister Gray?" Wrinkles asked, having been quietly studying the detective for some time.

"Not much," was the reply. "We're about like a ship becalmed at sea. I see no likelihood that our trip here will gain us anything."

"S'pose you'll go back to Phila, eh?"

"No. Old man Thackera has made me an offer, and I'll bag the game if it takes ten years, providing the old gent's money holds out, and I guess he's got plenty."

"Yas, I reckon so. Ye don't think the game will tech here?"

"I do not!"

"Neither do I!"

There was something in the boy's tone decidedly significant, and Gray gazed at him inquiringly.

"Why?" he interrogated.

"Because I've got an idea they've bin here already, and lit out."

"Hal! What makes you think that?"

"I d'anno, 'less it's because I'm gittin' kinder 'spishus uv thet feller Mulligan."

"Why, what's the matter with Mulligan?"

"Why, I takes him fer bein' kinder crooked. Now, yer know, in ther first place, we hain't inquired at the other hotels. Trimble might 'a' easy bin here, an' slipped away without our knowing it."

"Maybe you are right. It won't do any harm to make some inquiries, at any rate."

"But, wait. Let me tell you what makes me suspicious. Last night, at Harrisburg, Mulligan give me the borrow for a dime to get a cigar with. A bit ago, I seed him in a barroom, treatin' sum fellers, and he had a big wad of bills!"

"Ah!"

"You bet! Now, where'd he git all this wealth, so quick?"

"That's a question. By Jove, boy, I believe you've hit a clew, again."

"So do I. Now, et ails possible that Trimble an' the gal were here, when we arrived, an' Mulligan found it out, an' got paid to let 'em get away."

"Your suggestion has reason. We will visit the other hotels and inquire."

"Nix! Let the hotels alone. Go buzz the station-master."

Taking the boy's advice, they hurried to the Baltimore depot, and collared the station-agent.

"Can you tell me what time Trimbal Thackera and daughter left here?" Gray demanded.

"Don't know any such parties!" was the reply.

"Have you noticed a young lady, and a man, say of forty, take a train, since midnight?"

"Yes. There have been several such couples."

"Strangers?"

"No—all residents here, except one couple, which took the early Baltimore train."

"Ah! will you kindly describe them? We are detectives, and trying to trail a pair of fugitives."

The station-master was evidently a keen observer, for he described Trimbal Thackera and Theo accurately.

"On track!" Wrinkles said, when it was ascertained that the fugitive broker had purchased tickets for Baltimore. It's 'bout as I figgered, in Mulligan's case, too!"

"Without a doubt!" Gray acknowledged. "We will hold a council, and corner the cuss down. I judge he won't be hard to scare."

So once more on the trail, they went back to the hotel, and apprised Theodore Thackera and Lawton.

Then, after a short consultation, Mulligan was sent for, to be treated to a cross-examination.

CHAPTER XVI.

CORNERING MULLIGAN.

WHEN Mulligan entered the parlor, Detective Gray arose, closed and locked the door, and put the key in his pocket.

The young Irishman instantly noticed the move, and wheeled around fiercely.

"What d'ye mean by that?" he demanded.

"You sit down and never mind!" Gray ordered, sternly. "We've got a few words to say to you, and want the door locked."

Mulligan dropped upon a chair, his face assuming a sort of bulldog expression.

"Well," he grunted, "what do you want?"

"We want to inform you that we have found out about the dirty trick you have played us in allowing Trimbal Thackera to escape when he was within our reach."

"Get out! Who's let him escape, I'd like to know?"

"You have, to be sure—you, and no one else. You knew he was in this city, and you've money in your pocket now that he paid you to aid him to elude us."

"It's a lie!"

"Bah! There is no use—no earthly use—of your denying it. We are all satisfied of your guilt, and the most sensible thing you can do is to own up to it."

"I'll own up to nothing!" Mulligan growled. "I've did square by yous, an' if ye don't like it, all yer got to do is say so, an' I'll go."

"You will do nothing of the kind. Unless you confess, I'll arrest you for abetting a criminal to escape, and you'll get your rations in jail hereafter. So neither your denial nor your stubbornness will avail you. You'll fare better to make a clean breast of it."

"Well, s'posin' I do—what you going to do 'bout it? Ef ye know I did it, why know it—I don't care. I didn't know Thackera was here, but I run across him an' he offered me some money to let him escape. I didn't promise him I wouldn't foller him, though."

"How much money did he give you?"

"Four thousand dollars. I'll start a fine saloon when I get back to Phila."

"Where did Trimbal Thackera go from here?"

"To Baltimore."

"From there, where?"

"That's for me to know an' you to find out. I know where he's gone, an' ye might hunt a year, without findin' him. But, I ain't goin' ter tell, so ready. If you want him bad enough to pay me ter guide you to where you'll find him, all right. If not, I'm as mum as a clam."

"Either you tell us where Thackera's objective destination is, or you get a term in the penitentiary!" Detective Gray said, sternly.

Whereat Mulligan laughed defiantly.

"That's nothin'!" he retorted, coolly. "I've been there before, an' a feller can live pretty near as comfortable in jail on four thousand dollars, as he can out. You can't scare me worth a cent. I wouldn't get more than two years at the most. So the only terms you can make wi' me ails my terms—and don't you forget it, Mr. Detective. If you want me, say so. I'm on the make, an' who ain't what gits a chance? Give me paper guarantee that I won't be touched for helpin' Thackera to escape, and three thousand dollars, an' I'll take you to Thackera's destination by close to the time he reaches it himself. If that don't suit you, go ahead an' jail me, and find your man as best you can, and I'll bet you'll pay out twice three thousand before you get on track of him. That's all I've got to say 'bout the matter!"

He was cool, sneering and triumphant, and evidently meant just what he said, for he was one of that stolid sort of beings who would suffer almost any penalty rather than yield a particle, once he had formed a resolution.

Gray glanced at the other members of the searching-party, and then took out his watch.

"Well, we'll take you back to Philadelphia, then, to-night!" he said. "I shall have to handcuff you, and keep you under lock and key till we are ready."

"Suit yourself about that—it matters not to me if you bind my feet. I sent the most of my money home, a bit ago, and you thieves won't get hold of that."

Gray produced the bracelets and put them on the Irishman's wrists, and locked him in a large closet which opened off the room.

He then returned to his three companions.

"Well! what's to be done?" Gray demanded, as he lit a cigar. "Matters have developed thus far, and are at a standstill. Our man has given us the slip, and each hour undoubtedly is increasing the distance between us and him."

"Have you any idea where he is going?" Lawton asked, anxious for Theo's safety.

"South, probably—perhaps to Florida; maybe to Cuba!"

"If he goes to the latter—?"

"About all we could then do would be to get possession of the girl, as I presume we would have no end of trouble in trying to get him back into the United States."

"Ef we kin git the gal, I'm willin' ter let Trim go ter the Fejee islands," the farmer declared. "But the girl I will have if we have to travel all over the world."

"I echo your sentiments!" added Lawton.

"Here, too! I thirty-second the motion," put in Wrinkles.

"That's all well enough!" Gray smiled. "It's well enough to have a monument of resolution, but there are frequent instances where something else besides resolution is requisite, and this case is one of the instances. We're all desirous of giving chase, but at present are all in the dark. Our man may have gone in one of a hundred different ways from Baltimore, and his destination like enough would be some place we would least suspect. About the only thing I know of to do is to go to Baltimore, and endeavor to get on the trail there."

"Then you think there is no hope of learning anything definite from Mulligan?" Lawton asked.

"None at all, except we accede to his demand. Mulligan is one of the bulldog sort. He has made up his mind to just what he will do and what he won't, and I doubt if you could move him from his purpose if you were to hang him."

"D'ye think he could be trusted to guide us to whar we'd find Trim an' the gal, if he was to git the money?" Mr. Thackera asked.

"I hardly know about that. He is unscrupulous enough to sell himself in any way, but I wouldn't trust him out of sight. If you are inclined to test the matter that way, why, perhaps we can make the thing work by keeping him under strict surveillance. Then you are running your chances that he knows nothing definite about where the fugitive is going."

It was a knotty thing to decide on, and more than an hour was spent in discussing the situation and conjecturing.

Detective Gray seemed loth to deal with Mulligan at all; Farmer Thackera and Lawton were anxious and undecided, while Wrinkles was in favor of accepting Mulligan's terms and running the risk.

"It's the only way out o' the woods!" he argued.

"If we don't deal wi' the feller, we're baffled, in the outset, unless we're lucky enuff ter pick up the trail, ourselves, which ain't likely. So fer as Mulligan's knowin' where Trimble is a-goin', I'll bet ten cents ter a terrapin, he knows just where they're aimin' fer. If ye bargain to pay him the cash, when he takes ye to Trimble's destination, he'll not take ye up unless he's sure o' winnin'. Ef he knows where they're goin', he'll give 'em up afore he goes to jail, an' don't yer fergit it. Of course, a watch will have to be kept over him, but that won't be a hard job."

"Like all your theories this one has considerable weight, though I do hate to deal with a rascal on his own terms!" Gray declared. "What do you think about it, Mr. Thackera?"

"I'm willin' to pay the price, an' more, if I am sure, or if there is a fair prospect of getting the girl!" the farmer replied.

"I presume you would have to return home, to get the money?"

"That's not necessary. I generally carry a dollar or two sewed up in me duds in case I get hungry, an' ef I get strapped, why a telegram to ther bank at hum will secure me credit anywhere."

"Very well. I'll see what Mulligan will do. But, understand: under no circumstances is he to be paid any money until we have as good as got the game bagged. Otherwise I'll drop out."

"Agreed!" asserted the other.

Accordingly, Mulligan was brought out of the closet, and the proposition made to him, that he be paid his price, and given his liberty, as soon as he had guided the party to Trimbal Thackera's destination.

Detective Gray put the terms and conditions, in a clear and precise manner, leaving not the slightest possibility for a misunderstanding.

Mulligan listened, attentively, none of the stolid expression leaving his face.

"You've got the thing cut purty fine!" he said, finally, "but I don't know as it matters. If I agree to your proposition, what assurance have I that yew will act square?"

"The word of four honorable men!" Gray said, sternly. "You perform your part and you can depend upon it that we will perform ours."

"Very well. Thackera has gone to Montreal. If you hasten the pursuit, you may get him there. I presume he will not stay there long, but git a place in the country where he will be less likely to be found."

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

THE evening train took the party to Harrisburg, in time to catch the northward-bound Buffalo Express.

The handcuffs were removed from Mulligan's hands, but a watch was kept upon him during the night.

He appeared to have no disposition to escape,

however, for he settled himself comfortably down in one of the seats, and his snores, all night long, attested that he was sleeping the sleep not usually credited to evil-doers.

Buffalo was reached early in the morning, and here the party tarried but a couple of hours, awaiting a Canadian train, which would take them through to connect with the Montreal Express.

During the wait, Wrinkles wandered away from the depot, along Exchange and up Main street, and frequently paused to watch some bootblack working at his trade.

If the "shine" met his approval, he nodded and walked off. Otherwise, he gave the "shiner" a lecture, there and then, and advised him to come to Philadelphia and learn his trade.

At last, it was train time, and the party set out once more.

Farmer Thackera was a lively old man, and was never more in his element than to-day, when he cracked jokes and told tales, right merrily.

Hamilton was reached, in due time, and a change of cars was made, for Montreal.

The day had begun to wane, and the journey ahead, was not, prospectively, bright, for miles upon miles were yet to be traveled, and that, too, through a furious, blinding snow-storm.

Of course the passengers were comfortably provided for, but, at the same time, it is an odd dispositioned person who likes to travel by rail, through a snow-storm.

Wrinkles put in a couple of hours of the afternoon, in sleep, and when he awoke, he found that all the rest of his party were enjoying the same boon.

After reading awhile, the gamin, seeing that all were yet asleep, arose, and sauntered back through the train.

In passing through the next-to-the-last car, he made a discovery that, for the instant, nearly took his breath away.

Occupying a seat by himself, and dressed in the height of fashion, was the identical colored lad whom Wrinkles had twice seen at the Thackera mansion, in Philadelphia!

He was reading a novel, and did not see the boot-black detective, who as soon as he had recovered from his surprise, hastened back to the car he had started from.

Arousing all but Mulligan, he made known the discovery, and Lawton was sent to take a peep through the door at the broker's servant.

When Lou returned he corroborated Wrinkles's recognition.

"The coon is on his way to join his master, then!" Detective Gray said, "and our trail is now clear, as the Indian would say. When we arrive at Montreal, all but myself and Wrinkles go to a hotel, there to remain until wanted. We will shadow the coon!"

Having no fear that he would be recognized Gray secured a seat in the car occupied by the colored boy, and thus the journey was continued, until the train finally arrived at Montreal. Gray was slightly acquainted with the city, and directed Lawton and the farmer what hotel to seek; then he and Wrinkles "went for the coon."

When the lad got off the cars, valise in hand, it appeared he knew where he was going, for he aimed for one of the colossal hostleries near the depot.

The detectives, as a matter of course, followed, and when the colored lad registered his name as "Adolphus Clay, Philadelphia," they were close behind him, awaiting their turn.

Clay was assigned to Room 128, and disappeared, in company with a porter.

The detectives then examined the register, and to their surprise and delight, found that Trimbal Thackera and daughter had been assigned to rooms Nos. 8 and 9 some time earlier in the day.

"The game is ours!" Gray decided, after they had registered, and been conducted to Room 30, just across the hall from Nos. 8 and 9. "The game is ours, and all we've got to do is to bag it."

"How do you propose to go at it?" Wrinkles demanded—"sail in an' arrest Trimbles, at once?"

"Yes. The sooner the better. As soon as he is under arrest Thackera wants to take the girl and start for Herkimer. Then, if I can get a requisition, I'll take Trimbles, as you call him, back to the U. S."

As a light burned in one of the rooms, they concluded that the broker had not yet retired; so leaving their own room, they softly crossed the hall, and rapped at No. 9, the room where the light showed over the transom.

The door was immediately opened by Trimbal Thackera, who evidently had been expecting some one—Clay, the colored boy, maybe.

No sooner did he see the detectives, however, than he tried to shut the door.

It was no use, however; for Gray and Wrinkles pushed it forcibly open and entered.

Thackera then leaped away to a further side of the apartment, drawing a revolver as he did so.

"Back, there!" he ordered, sternly. "You shall never take me alive. You have hounded me down, but I'll never hang for murder!"

As the words fell from his lips, he placed the muzzle to his temple and fired.

Then he tottered and fell, heavily.

In a moment Theo flew in from the next room, and the crowd that quickly gathered about the door of the room were treated to a tragic scene.

Detective Gray explained that while they were attempting to arrest the man, the fatal act had been done.

The hotel proprietor then dismissed the crowd and notified the proper authorities, who took charge of Trimbal Thackera's remains.

Theo was very much grieved over her father's

death, but her grief was somewhat lessened because of her restoration to her grandfather, and—Lawton.

A few words will suffice to tell what remains to be told.

A few days later the party returned to Philadelphia, where Trimbal Thackera was buried.

Then, accompanied by Theo, Farmer Thackera set out for his home, a happy man, as was Lou Lawton, who went with him, to accept the overseership of the old man's numerous farms. And, "When the robins nest again," it is more than probable that there will be a grand wedding in Herkimer, with Lou and Theo the happy couple.

Mulligan was released, and, true to his remark, started a big saloon as a result of his strategic financiering.

Vose Van Vetchin did not die, as was expected, but recovered, and, be it said to his credit, afterward led a correct life.

As for Wrinkles, he and Gray were so well pleased with each other that they formed a partnership, and stand to-day unrivaled in their profession.

They received a handsome sum of money from Theodore Thackera for their services, and Wrinkles bought a snug house, which he intends to occupy as soon as he finds a bird to put in it.

Only recently he and Gray led a raid upon Rosamond's resort, and the fair gambler was arrested and sentenced to sixty days' imprisonment.

Paul Percival received his wife back, and they are now living happily together.

And thus we come to the end of a strange life-record, so far as this romance is concerned—a record that, furnished with correct names, would be recognized by many a Philadelphian as "an over true tale."

THE END.

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- 326 The Ten Pardas; or, The Terror of Take-Notice.
- 336 Big Benson; or, The Queen of the Lasso.
- 345 Pitiless Matt; or, Red Thunderbolt's Secret.
- 356 Cool Sam and Par; or, The Terrible Six.
- 366 Velvet Foot, the Indian Detective.
- 386 Captain Outlaw; or, The Buccaneer's Girl Foe.
- 396 Rough Rob; or, The Twin Champions of Blue Blazes.
- 411 The Silken Lasso; or, The Rose of Ranch Robin.
- 418 Felix Fox, the Boy Spotter.
- 425 Texas Tramp, the Border Rattler.
- 436 Phil Flash, the New York Fox.
- 445 The City Vampires; or, Red Rolfe's Pigeon.
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- 470 The Boy Shadow; or, Felix Fox's Hunt.
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- 502 Branded Ben, the Night Ferret.
- 512 Dodger Dick, the Wharf-Spy Detective.
- 521 Dodger Dick's Best Dodge.
- 528 Fox and Falcon, the Bowery Shadows.
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- 543 Dodger Dick's Double; or, The Rival Boy Detective.
- 553 Dodger Dick's Desperate Case.
- 563 Dodger Dick, the Boy Vidocq.
- 573 The Two Shadows.
- 582 Dodger Dick's Drop.
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